

POCKET EDITION.

Ladd



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VOL. I. \$2.50 a Year. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, No. 98 William Street, New York. Price, Five Cents. No. 1.



"YOUR HUSBAND IS DEAD, AND THIS SACHEL CONTAINS ALL HIS EFFECTS."

**A BRIDE OF A DAY;**  
**Or, The Mystery of Winifred Leigh.**  
A POOR GIRL'S HISTORY.  
BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL.

CHAPTER I.  
A FATEFUL MEETING.  
THE Columbia on her evening trip cityward from Coney Island was not so crowded as usual

with her gay burden of human freight, for the August day had been cool, cloudy, and delightful even in New York city. Among the excursionists was a party of young girls comprising half of the force of salesladies employed in the great fancy goods house of Vellingham Brothers, Broadway, on the annual trip to the sea-shore given them by their employers. They were for the most part, gay, happy young people to whom the charming excitement of the trip was as rare as enjoyable—



ordinary, commonplace young girls with whom our story has nothing to do.

With but one exception.

There was one girl of the party, however, whose acquaintance we desire to make.

She stood a little apart from her companions, leaning lightly against the guard-rail. Compared with her fellows, she was as a diamond among pebbles.

Not yet seventeen years of age, she was slender, graceful and supple as a young willow. She was strikingly beautiful, with fair, pale complexion, great vivid blue eyes like glowing lamps, straight and slender eyebrows of rich golden hue, and hair of a still deeper golden tint—the yellow gold that the old painters loved to depict. The young face, sweet, vivacious and spirited, indicated an impulsive and passionate nature, quick to love, and quick to hate;—a nature with many faults perhaps, but truthful and generous to the very core.

This girl was Winifred Leigh.

She was American by birth and parentage. She had been an employee of Vellingham Brothers since she had been placed there as a cash-girl at nine years of age. Previous to that time, her life as far back as she could remember had been spent at an obscure boarding-school, from which she never went “home” for holidays or vacations, for she had no “home” to go to. Her bills had been paid with unfailing regularity by the one living relative known to her, an aunt. This aunt, Miss Evelyn Leigh, had never written to Winifred, had never exhibited any tenderness of feeling for her, but, on the contrary, seemed to regard the young girl with actual aversion and abhorrence.

Of her parentage, Winifred was completely ignorant. While at school she had been too young to ask her teachers concerning her history, and, had she done so, the inquiry would have been fruitless, they being no better informed upon the subject than she herself was.

As may therefore be supposed, Winifred Leigh, who had no other home than the plain boarding-house where she slept and took her meals; with no friends; who never received any letters; who seemed to stand utterly alone in the world;—was a living mystery to her fellows even as she was to herself. But, by virtue of her willfulness—her pretty, imperious ways—her generous nature—her unselfishness, and her beauty, she was the leading spirit, the recognized queen of the little band that she led so royally.

This excursion to Coney Island was destined to be the most memorable and fateful journey of Winifred Leigh's life.

Even now, as she stood leaning over the guard rail, the swift breezes bringing the ruddy flushes to her ordinarily pale cheeks, the person who was to change the whole current of her life, who was to cause her the sharpest anguish a human soul can know, who was to rob her of her faith in humanity and almost of her faith in Heaven, stood not five yards distant from her.

He was an American gentleman not over twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, very stylish and handsome. He was well-bred,

quiet and reserved. He wore a plain gray suit and no jewelry, and was to all outward appearances a person of unquestioned refinement.

This young man was Hubert Lansdowne. He had already dissipated a handsome property, and was beginning to “settle down” as he phrased it, upon the comparatively small income which still remained to him. He was luxurious in all his tastes, exquisitely selfish, determined to gratify himself in every fancy at whatever cost to himself or others, and yet, notwithstanding these grave faults, was possessed of delightful and charming qualities which never failed to procure him friends everywhere.

As Winifred turned her gaze away from the waters over which she was thoughtfully looking, her eyes met his, and as she flushed and averted her face, a look of sudden admiration came into his.

Winifred joined her companions while Lansdowne beckoned to a friend in company with him.

Do you see that young girl yonder, Marshall? The one with a wide-rimmed hat trimmed with gray flowers? Does she belong to that crowd?”

“I think so,” was the answer; “that is, if you mean the young girl with golden hair and wearing a short, gray dress.”

“I never saw a creature so beautiful,” Lansdowne murmured with suppressed enthusiasm. “She reminds me of a supple young lioness, so straight and brave and strengthful is—”

Lansdowne's friend smiled, and Lansdowne checked himself irritably.

“What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing; only this is the third face you have fallen in love with to-day.”

“Nonsense; I saw one or two beautiful faces, of which I spoke to you, but a face like that, never.”

With a shrug of his shoulders Marshall turned away and lighted a cigar, while Lansdowne, leaning leisurely against the capstan, bestowed the most rapt attention upon Winifred throughout the remainder of the sail. He admired her beauty with the eyes of an artist; a longing to hear her speak began to possess him, and a determination to make her acquaintance awoke within him. He had fallen in love at first sight with a girl of whom he knew nothing.

“But I *will* know her,” he said to himself; “she is high-bred, a trifle haughty and imperious, and it is easy to see that she is romantic, impulsive and warm-hearted. It is strange, but I never before saw a woman whom I would be willing to marry. I never yet set my heart on having anything but I have acquired it, and that girl *shall* be my wife! I wonder how I can discover who she is?”

At that very moment he was enlightened, for a girlish voice called suddenly from the midst of a group of young ladies a little distance off:

“Winifred—Winifred Leigh! Come here a minute, will you?”

As Winifred moved to obey the call, Lansdowne said to himself:

“Winifred Leigh! What an odd name; but pretty, and now to make Miss Leigh's acquaintance.”

But it was not so easy a thing even for Hu-



bert Lansdowne. No opportunity was afforded him to approach Winifred during the trip, for she comported herself with such reserve and apparent unconsciousness of his existence that he was forced to maintain his distance with much inward chagrin.

But fate befriended him at the very last. As the Columbia neared the pier at Twenty-second street, he made his way to the gang-plank. There were crowding and confusion, as is usual at the moment of debarkation, and somewhere in the midst of the throng of crowding, jostling excursionists, Winifred missed her footing and stumbled.

In an instant Hubert Lansdowne sprung to her assistance. He drew her arm in his and conducted her safely upon the pier, released her promptly, and raised his hat in a respectful bow. She had barely time to glance at him and express her thanks, when the rest of the party moved away and she with them.

It had been a pleasant holiday, after which Winifred would not have thought once of the handsome young stranger had she been permitted to forget him; but her companions bantered her about her conquest, and, as a natural consequence, she did think of him again and again.

The acquaintance thus strangely begun—if it might, as yet, be called an acquaintance—was not suffered by Lansdowne to flag. The very next day he made the discovery that Winifred was an employee of Vellingham Brothers, and, satisfied and delighted with his discovery, made frequent opportunities to visit the store, making purchases which required the attention of the young ladies near Winifred's especial locality.

Later he presumed upon bowing regularly to Winifred, and several evenings upon her return to her boarding-house she found that bouquets had been left with the landlady for her.

During all this while Hubert Lansdowne treated her with the utmost respect, while her companions, delighting in the little mystery, renewed their banterings about her conquest. And, lonely all her life long, knowing no love of kindred, with a host of strange, girlish yearnings, was it any wonder that Winifred should have grown to regard this admirer of hers with deepening interest?—that she should watch for his bouquets, and treasure them when they came.

It was then that she needed what in all her life she never had known—a mother's care and love; but it was not hers.

At the end of two weeks, Mr. Lansdowne found opportunity, during a call at the store, to address Miss Leigh, and his manner was so respectful that she was in no wise alarmed. She was reserved, rather haughty at the respectful assurance of the handsome stranger, but secretly pleased that she should have won his admiration.

Lansdowne was thoroughly in earnest in his desire to marry this beautiful young girl. He had never loved before, and the very obstacles which intervened between him and Winifred only served to strengthen his pursuit of her.

Toward the beginning of fall it so happened that Lansdowne and Winifred occasionally walked and talked together, and, as the days

went on, exchanged letters, and finally became engaged.

It was one day in September that Lansdowne met Winifred and walked with her from the store to her boarding-house.

"You look depressed to-night, my darling," he said; "what has happened? Are you particularly tired?"

"Yes, I believe I am," Winifred replied, with a sigh, and yet with a half-laugh; "yes, I believe I am tired of it all."

"But isn't it your own fault, Winifred? Have I not told you time and time again I cannot bear to have you endure the drudgery of your position? It must not be, Winifred. I love you, and you have promised to be my wife. Let me write to your aunt and ask her consent to our marriage at once."

"She will refuse it," Winifred declared, sorrowfully. "She has hated me all my life. I would not write to her, and I beg that you will not."

"You have no other relatives, Winifred?"

"None; I am alone in the world, poor and uncared for, as I told you long ago."

"And so am I almost alone in the world. I have no one but myself to consult in the matter of my marriage, and although my income is slender, being only a little more than a thousand a year, we can live well upon that sum, can we not? You do not care for splendor and luxury, if we have each other, Winifred. You see I am as isolated as you are. But, let me tell you what I came especially to say to you to-night, my darling. Let me tell you what I have dared to do."

She looked wonderingly at him.

"Don't think it was presumptuous in me, Winifred; but, dear, yesterday I saw the dearest little cottage and I hired it for three months," he said, in a tone full of caressing and pleading. "And I told the housekeeper that I would bring her young mistress home to her to-morrow. You have promised to be my wife, dearest; let it be now! Why should we wait or wish for the consent of your aunt, who cares nothing for you? You love and trust me, and you are all the world to me. Shall I not have my bride now? Say yes, Winifred."

Her girl's heart beat wildly, her cheeks glowed and her blue eyes drooped. She was sorely tempted to yield to her lover's passionate pleading, and he, seeing his advantage, continued to urge his cause with anxious earnestness. The one desire of his life was to possess her as his wife. In return, she loved him, her life was lonely and unsatisfied, and to be loved and treasured, and the dearest of all the world to Hubert Lansdowne, seemed to her a bliss too great to realize.

Was it not natural that youth and love should win the day? And because it was so, Winifred promised to marry him at once.

In rapture Lansdowne clasped her hand warmly in his.

"My darling, may Heaven deal with me as I deal with you. Your life henceforth shall be one long delicious happiness. We will be married at once and then go to our pretty little cottage for our honeymoon. I will meet you in two hours from now and will drive you directly



to St. Philip's. Will you be brave for my sake, and not fail me, Winifred? When I leave you at your door in a moment, will you promise to come to me in love and trust, in two hours from now?"

"It is so soon," she said hesitatingly, and shrinkingly, "but, I will come, Hubert."

Her few little arrangements were soon made, and when the carriage drove up to the door of her boarding-house Winifred was ready. They drove to the church and the small bridal-party marched up to the altar.

It was almost time for the week-day evening service, and a few early worshipers were already in their seats. There was a brief delay, and then, the minister proceeded with the marriage ceremony.

It was a singular bridal, and the fateful ceremony was over at length. Winifred, shy, frightened and trembling, was Winifred Leigh no longer, but Winifred Lansdowne. She stood as in a maze, while her young husband kissed her, and, as she signed her name to the marriage register was so grave that one might have fancied the dark pall of her future was shutting down already upon her young life, instead of being just about to enter the path whose beginning, although seemingly strewn with flowers, was full of sharpest thorns.

## CHAPTER II.

### HER WEDDING-DAY.

A LITTLE way distant from Jersey City, on the Heights, stands a pretty little house half villa, half city-built, set in the midst of a pleasant lawn extended by terraces to the street.

This was the house which Hubert Lansdowne had hired furnished, to which to bring home his young bride upon the evening of the day of their marriage.

Arrived at the house, Lansdowne helped his bride from the carriage, in which they had been driven from the ferry, and led her into the hall, which was wide and long, furnished with tall black walnut chairs and sofa. They passed into the little parlor beyond, where, panting and breathless, the housekeeper joined them, full of profuse apologies for not having been at the door in place of the neat-handed little maid-servant.

She was an energetic looking woman, with an abrupt, awkward manner, but her face was kindly and prepossessing, and Winifred liked her at sight.

Conducted by the housekeeper to whom Lansdowne introduced her as her future mistress, Winifred followed her to her rooms, while Lansdowne went to the sitting-room which he had selected for his own use.

Winifred's apartments opened upon a second story piazza, where in summer it must have been a most delightful place to have sat. The rooms were neatly furnished, and wore a look of daintiness and freshness seldom seen in houses let already furnished.

Declining the assistance of the housekeeper, Winifred renovated her toilet as well as possible, and brushed out and rearranged her lovely golden hair.

"I feel like the old woman in the nursery

story" she said to herself with a happy laugh. "I wonder if I be really and truly Winifred Leigh of Vellingham Brothers? I wonder if I shall awaken presently and find all this but a delightful dream?"

She was standing before her mirror, slowly arranging her hair, thinking of the liberty of her new life, of the love and care that were to be hers, of the life in its broadest sense which her lover had promised her, when Lansdowne tapped lightly at the half-open door and then entered, walking up to her, halting at her side, and encircling her waist with an arm as they stood together before the mirror.

"My dear little girl!" he said, softly kissing her hair, "I think the more I am with you the more I realize my faults and weaknesses, faults and weaknesses which you could never understand. I am selfish and fond of having my own way at any cost, but, standing here beside you now, my little wife, I promise to be a better man for your sake, and to become worthy of your trust and love."

"You are worthy now, dear," she returned gently. "Think, Hubert dearest, you are the first gentleman I ever knew! How strange that you should have fallen in love with me at first sight, who had not a friend in the world and whom my only living relative hates."

He smiled indulgently in her eager upturned face.

"And that reminds me of something," he went on. "You remember a few weeks ago I spoke to you of the feasibility of my writing to your aunt, notifying her of our engagement, and asking her consent to our marriage? And that you told me you thought it was of no use whatever? Well, dear, I dared to disobey you in that case. A day or so after that I wrote to Miss Leigh, and I should like to have seen her surprise when she read it. Do you know, dear, I have fancied from the first that you have a fortune of your own, and that your aunt would inherit it if you died unmarried while a minor? This theory would account for her hatred of you."

"But I do not believe that I have a fortune, Hubert; I know I have always been dependent upon my aunt."

"Well, fortune or not, you are a fortune in yourself, my darling—beautiful, with every grace of mind and heart; charming, well-bred, you are a grand prize and I am more than satisfied with you."

"If you are satisfied what do you think I am?" she asked, tenderly and softly.

He stooped and kissed her for answer.

"Perhaps I have never told you—it is of so little consequence—but a few weeks ago I was visiting a friend in the neighborhood of your aunt's place in Jersey, Leighlands you know she calls it; so that when you told me that Miss Evelyn Leigh, of Leighlands, Warren county, New Jersey, was your relative, I knew at once who and what you were. She is said to be very rich, and as she is unmarried you will of course succeed to her wealth. You see, it was quite right for me to make friends with her, Winifred, and to write her a nice letter, telling her of our intended marriage, and asking her forgiveness. The reply is due—indeed is over-



due, and I am momentarily expecting to receive her letter containing a message 'Bless you my children; come to Leighlands and your loving aunt at once.'"

Winifred laughed and then they descended to the parlors and shortly after were summoned to the dining room, where a tempting dinner was served. And afterward, the bridal pair sat in the moonlight in the oriel window where Lansdowne quoted poetry in an impassioned voice, and talked like another Romeo, and Winifred sat, silent and oppressed with a happiness so exquisite she could scarce tell it from pain.

"And am I to be happy as this all my life?" she thought. "Oh, I cannot realize it."

The evening had half-passed away when the little maid-servant who had been sent by the housekeeper for the evening mail, tapped at the parlor door with—the long expected letter from Warren county, New Jersey, and Lansdowne, seeing the postmark, exclaimed with a laugh:

"What an opportune wedding-present! Come, Winifred, let us see in what terms our worthy aunt vouchsafes her forgiveness."

Winifred came and sat beside her husband, who, with an arm about her waist, read aloud these words:

"LEIGHLANDS, Warren Co., N. J., Oct. 1st.

"MR. HUBERT STUART LANSDOWNE:—

"I have received your letter announcing your engagement and intended marriage. I am not at all surprised that Winifred should have made a sudden marriage. Allow me to say in response to your un-called-for announcement to me, that in years gone by I provided for Winifred only from a sense of duty; that as I have done this for the past eight years, I now again wash my hands of her forever. She will never inherit one penny of mine. I will never see either of you, so help me Heaven! One word more: It will not be well for you to boast of your relationship to me, since Winifred is the daughter of my sister Eleanor, who died at her daughter's birth with no wedding-ring on her finger.

"EVELYN LEIGH."

Lansdowne read every word of this cruel letter aloud to his young bride, his voice growing strangely husky as he neared its close. When he had finished, the letter dropped from his hands to the floor and for some minutes a terrible silence reigned between them. Winifred felt his arm drop away from her waist and his whole person shrink away from her, and to the horror and anguish evoked by her aunt's letter, a new terror was added.

"Oh, Hubert," she cried pitifully, "you don't blame me, do you? I did not know, indeed I did not know! Hubert, look at me! Put your arm around me again; speak to me!"

She clung to him in agonized entreaty and clasped her arms lovingly about him, but he put her away—not roughly, but so coldly and deliberately as to chill her very soul. And then he arose and walked to the opposite window, and stood gazing out into the moonlight with his back toward her.

She crept after him, agonized and bewildered, and laid her hand timidly on his arm. It seemed to her that he was turned to marble. By not one look or emotion did he recognize her presence.

"Hubert," she pleaded, "only speak to me! I told you I was poor; you know, I told you that at the very beginning. I was never taught to

consider myself my aunt's heiress—oh, Hubert, I am so frightened; what shall I do?"

She wrung her little hands pitifully, but he paid no heed to her, for his own griefs and supposed wrongs were so paramount in Mr. Hubert Stuart Lansdowne's mind that he knew no pity or consideration for his young bride.

"Hubert," she sobbed, "are you angry with me? Surely I never deceived you; I never thought, I never said I was my aunt's heiress."

Still he did not turn or lower his gaze, and Winifred was silent, an awful wave of desolation sweeping over her soul, till at last, her love for him, her longing for sympathy and kindness, impelled her to renew her pleading.

"Hubert," she pleaded, in a low broken voice—"Hubert dear, if you will only overlook this stain upon my birth I will be a better wife to you all my days! I am the same girl you married, the same loving Winifred, and I will be your very slave and worshiper if you will only love me again, and lift me out of this despair. I did not mean to deceive you, Hubert."

For the first time he spoke, cold as ice.

"Between you and your aunt, I have been grossly deceived. I fell in love with you at first sight, but had I loved you a million times as well I would not have married you had I known what you are. In our first interview you told me who you were. I had seen Leighlands and known Miss Leigh, at least, that she was unmarried, unsocial, and very wealthy, and when you told me that she was your aunt and only living relative, I naturally supposed you to be the legitimate daughter of a younger brother, and Miss Evelyn Leigh's heiress. This idea may have influenced my resolve to marry you—we will say that it did, but it did not influence my love for you. I find now that I did not show sufficient care in choosing my wife. I find now that your beauty has been a lure to lead me into a horrible trap."

The clear, cold words sounded to Winifred's ears like the striking of clods upon a coffin-lid. She shivered and uttered a low cry that ought to have pierced her husband's heart to its very core, but in its wounded pride and outraged selfishness that heart of Hubert Lansdowne was hard as adamant.

"Oh, Hubert, Hubert!" she said, "don't speak so to me! I am your wife, your own wife—"

"Unfortunately—yes, you are my wife," he sneered. "You have achieved the shelter of an honorable name, that is true; you are provided for—but think of me with my noble name, my noble family, my— Here I stand with a life blighted by my own mad folly! I supposed I was marrying Miss Leigh's heiress, and instead, after all, it is not only a shop-girl—that was bad enough—but I have married—who!"

He uttered a laugh that was full of bitterness and turning, abruptly left the room.

Winifred called him to come back, and ran after him to the front door of the house, but he did not once look around or speak to her. She made her way back to the parlor, and sunk down upon the sofa, grief-stricken and stunned, and only conscious that her short day of happiness was over.

How long she sat there she never knew, but



it was hours later when at last she aroused herself from her stupor and lifted her lovely golden head, and revealed a face so pale, so woeful that seeing it, it seemed almost as if angels must have wept with pity. She stirred feebly, and the fatal letter lying on the floor rustled at her feet. She picked it up mechanically, and then the full recollection of her misery burst upon her in an anguish like torturing flames of fire.

"I must find Hubert and implore him to forgive me! Oh, if I had only died before he ever saw me! I love him better than my own existence and I have wrecked his life. I must find him! oh, I *must* find him!"

She sought for him in every room in the house, in every nook of the moonlighted garden, but the search was vain.

Then at last the little maid-servant timidly brought up a letter, which she said the gentleman had told her to give to "Missus."

Winifred seized it. It was addressed to herself in Lansdowne's handwriting. She tore it open and read:

"WINIFRED:—I must have time to reconcile myself to the altered condition of affairs. I am going away for a day or two with a friend—Marshall. I will return when I can meet you calmly. HUBERT."

That was all. No word of love or sympathy; no thought in this supreme hour save of himself!

Winifred read it with tearless eyes.

"I shall never see him again, never. I feel that we are parted forever and—on our wedding-day!"

All that evening she remained in her room. The housekeeper came up to inquire if her young mistress would take any refreshment before retiring, and then Winifred told her that Mr. Lansdowne had gone away for a day or two, and that she would not require refreshment, but desired simply to be left alone.

No one came near her again until morning. The housekeeper could not help noting the change in the young bride's appearance, and remarked upon it with wonder, expressing her surprise at the sudden departure of the bridegroom upon his wedding-day. Winifred dismissed her with a word or two, not being able to bear her sympathetic questioning or curious surprise.

The "day or two" which Hubert Lansdowne had fixed for the limit of his absence passed slowly, and then, instead of his return, a letter came from him dated Philadelphia, stating that he could not prevail upon himself to return as yet, and was about to go West in company with Marshall. He would be gone probably two weeks.

"It is as I said," Winifred thought, in stony despair; "I shall never see him again."

And from that moment the wronged young bride ceased utterly to expect her husband's return.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE VILLAIN'S MASK.

THREE weeks had passed by. The October day was dying in a tinge of rosy light, and Winifred, standing in the oriel window of her

pretty little cottage home, looking slender, almost shadowy in her black dress, turned her head eagerly at the sight of some one coming up the street, whom, although at first she did not recognize, a second glance showed her was her husband's friend and companion, Marshall.

In an instant the expression of her face, so pale and wistful, so wan and sorrowing, changed into beaming gladness. She started toward the door at the same moment Marshall ascended the steps of the house and the two met in the hall, he, grave and silent as one overcome with great grief.

Winifred looked at him in amazement.

"What is the matter, Mr. Marshall?" she demanded; "where is Mr. Lansdowne? Has Mr. Lansdowne arrived?"

"No, madam," answered Marshall, "I came alone."

All the gladness died sharply out of Winifred's face.

"And why are you alone? Why have you brought back—yes, you have brought back my husband's sachel. Where is he then? When will he return?"

"I have bad news for you, madam," he answered. "I have brought back my friend's dressing sachel because it belongs to you, with all his effects," and he extended it to her.

Winifred shuddered and her great blue eyes dilated wildly. She did not take the proffered sachel.

"I don't understand?" she whispered.

"No? My friend left home in a strange and desperate mood, as you know," Marshall went on smoothly. "He was wild and reckless as I had never seen him before; I could do nothing with him; he would drink—usually he drank very little—but, now, he would not be guided by me. There was gambling in a saloon to which he would go, and, inflamed with liquor, excited by the game—there was a scrimmage and he fell—"

Winifred uttered a strange, low cry.

"Do you understand? Can you bear the truth madam?" he said solemnly. "It is a dreadful thing to tell you, but—your husband is dead, and this sachel contains all his effects."

There was a moment's awful silence. Winifred did not shriek, nor fall to the floor in a swoon. She only looked at him with a white and stony face, in which her two great blue eyes burned like living lamps. A slow shudder crept over her and she sunk down upon the hall chair without a word.

A sensation of decided nervousness stole over Marshall.

"He never knew what hurt him, madam," he said uneasily. "He was excited, drew his pistol, and before he knew what was what, a pistol shot had entered his own heart. I have brought you the statement of the newspapers from San Francisco."

He handed her several newspapers in which the marked passages were awfully prominent.

Her burning eyes scanned them, and her dazed brain managed to gain the meaning.

"Dead!" she whispered, "dead?"

"Yes, madam, dead and buried."

"Dead!" she repeated again, shivering, and then she covered her face with her hands and



made no further sign, uttered no moan, shed no tears.

After a little while, waiting in vain for her to speak, Marshall sought the housekeeper, to whom he delivered the message and then left the house.

The October sunset faded, the night came on, and still Winifred crouched in the chair in the hall. Toward ten o'clock the housekeeper, having heard all of Marshall's evil news, came in search of her young mistress and found her lying on the floor of the hall in a state of total unconsciousness. Assistance was summoned in haste, and she was carried to her own room, where restoratives were applied, but it was long before the heavy eyelids lifted, or the fluttering breath came and went between the white lips.

But when strength of mind and body came feebly back again, the next day, Winifred requested that Marshall be sent for, and during the day he obeyed the summons, finding Winifred in her easy-chair in the parlor, looking like some storm-swept flower.

"I want you to tell me more about my husband, Mr. Marshall," she said, tremulously. "Are you sure he was—killed? Did you, or did you not, tell me he was dead—and buried?"

"I told you, madam, he was dead and buried."

"And there was no last word for me? Did he never speak my name to you after leaving here?"

"Never but once, madam, and that was on the very day when he met his death," Marshall replied. "On that very day, when he was in his wildest and most reckless mood, he told me the story of his marriage to you, and said he married you because he supposed you to be an heiress; 'and tell her,' he said, 'if you ever see her again—for there is a presentiment on my mind that I never will—tell her that Hubert Lansdowne is not my real name, and that my real name will never be known to her.'"

"And those—those were his last words to me?"

"His very last, excepting— But I cannot tell you the rest," he said. "Let his words rest with him; let me try to forget them."

"But, I command you to tell me!" Winifred said, with sorrowful sternness. "Whatever he said you must tell me."

Marshall bowed with feigned reluctance.

"Since you command me! He said, if nothing happened—of which he had such a strong presentiment—he would never live with you again, or acknowledge you as his wife. That, in fact, he would repudiate you; having married you under an assumed name, he could easily do so, and that you would never know what your true name is."

The very incarnation of outraged innocence, Winifred rose to her feet.

"He said *this* to you?"

"He said this to me—I swear it!"

"And is it true?"

"It is true that Hubert Lansdowne is not his real name," Marshall replied; "it is true that his story of having an income of a thousand dollars a year was a fabrication. He was an adventurer, bent on marrying an heiress. Had

you proved to be an heiress, as he expected, he would have retained the very respectable name under which he married you. He found himself deceived, and determined to throw off the mask at once. You have not the shadow of a right to the name of Mrs. Lansdowne."

Winifred pointed to the door.

"You may leave me," she said.

He bowed low and withdrew.

Left alone, Winifred paced up and down the floor. A mere child in years, truthful, honest, frank and unsuspicious, she did not doubt a word of Marshall's story. Her life had been so dreary always that it was easier for her to believe that evil had come upon her instead of good.

After awhile, she caught sight of Lansdowne's sachel where the housekeeper had placed it on a chair inside the door.

She took it up, and carried it to the window, and using the keys attached to the handle opened it, and emptied its contents, her tears falling thick and fast upon the garments which Lansdowne had worn. She touched his dainty perfumes in their crystal-stoppered bottles, his carved, ivory-handled brushes, with a strange, aching agony at her heart, and—yes, there was actually his private diary which she had once or twice seen, but which he had always laughingly refused to open for her.

It was a little volume which fastened with a key, but the key was gone—Winifred knew that Lansdowne wore it on his watch-chain. There was a small steel poker on the hearth before the grate, and with a relentless hand Winifred pried off the dainty clasps, and read every entry, little dreaming that several days before Lansdowne had spent hours writing steadily in this little volume, making lying entries which were intended to destroy every lingering trace of Winifred's love for him, should not Marshall have accomplished the work thoroughly by his base falsehoods. She read every page, little guessing the truth of the whole affair was—that the entire story Marshall had so brought to her had been concocted between him and Lansdowne, and at this very moment when she stood there, stricken in her despair, her husband was not lying dead and buried in San Francisco, but was alive and well as herself.

Every page of the diary was full of references to her, her beauty, her sweetness, her grace, her expected fortune. Then, under date of the night of his flight from her, the date of his wedding to her, there was boldly avowed Lansdowne's rage and disappointment, and his declaration that he was glad that he had assumed a name not his own in marrying her.

"I shall make sure that I get a rich wife of good birth next time," he wrote. "As for Winifred, I shall abandon her at once. She'll have to go back to Vellingham Brothers and join the ranks behind the counter, or else bury herself somewhere in the city and sew, or sing, or dance for a living. In time, with her beauty she'll get a husband, and so will end my delightful little flirtation with a pretty Broadway shop-girl."

There was more in the same strain. Winifred read it all, and then burned the book upon her hearth.



The remainder of that night was spent in the indulgence of a grief whose bitterness words never can describe.

And when the next morning, toward mid-day, the housekeeper sought her, she found Winifred in bed raving in the delirium of brain fever.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

A LONG illness followed. For weeks life and death fought for the victory in the room where the wrecked young life had received so cruel a blow, and it was life which at last won the victory.

Through all the weary stages of convalescence Winifred patiently passed, and in November was able to walk about the house—Winifred, indeed! wan, woeful Winifred, with pale, thin face and great, burning eyes.

"I am almost well again, and so anxious to go away," she said, drearily. "The house was hired for three months, and the time will expire soon."

As convalescence proceeded toward recovery, Winifred took occasion to look over the pretty outfit which the indulgent young bridegroom had bought for his bride and had sent to the new home the day of the wedding. There were dresses and embroideries, laces and hosts of pretty trifles, and a few jewels—not costly, but pretty. All of which Winifred divided between the housekeeper and the servant-girl, greatly to their delight, but not a little to the housekeeper's consternation.

"But what would madam do for clothes for herself?"

"I have plenty in my old trunk," was the brief answer.

And then the old black trunk, such a startling memento of the old life which seemed so many years removed from her, was brought in, and Winifred was left to herself.

She opened the trunk—how long ago it seemed since she had closed it! and yet it was only a few weeks which had sufficed to change the happy, care-free girl into a woman whose life was wrecked on its very threshold. And those were bitter tears which Winifred shed over these mementoes—memorials of a life forever past!

For a week longer she remained at the cottage on the Heights. The last night of her stay was a sleepless one. For hours she had reviewed the events of her brief life, as she tossed on her pillow, considering one plan after another, and in turn rejecting all.

Hubert Lansdowne had foreseen that this very hour would come to Winifred. Knowing her proud spirit, he had believed that nothing would tempt her to seek her aunt after the reception of that cruel letter. He had believed she would rather starve than seek Miss Evelyn Leigh, and he had also believed that Winifred would seek almost any other form of employment rather than return to her old position with Vellingham Brothers. But illness and poverty have bent many a strong will and subdued many a proud spirit, and Lansdowne had not sufficiently counted upon these agents in considering Winifred's future course.

The idea that she should seek her aunt returned again to Winifred with strange pertinacity. She recalled every word of her insulting letter. She thought of her as a sour, despondent woman. She felt a longing to know more about her parentage, and no one could tell her but this woman, who, after all, was her blood relative. She could but cast her out if she went to her. Why not seek her, tell her her story, learn the particulars of her history, and ask her to find some sort of refuge for her?

"I will go to my aunt Evelyn," she resolved. "I will tell her all the truth, and if she turns me away from her door I shall be no worse off than I am now."

The morning dawned with a drizzling rain, and proved to be the beginning of one of those gray, dreary days that seem never so gray and dreary as in early autumn. At an early hour Winifred bade good-by to the housekeeper of the little cottage which had been the scene of such a strange experience to her, to take her solitary trunk with her, leaving it at the New York depot of the Midland Railroad, and set out alone—oh, so much more alone than she had ever been before, to begin again her battle with life.

Up to this time she had been hopeless, bitter and despairing. She was bitter still, but that morning a strange courage came to her, and her soul rose up strong and brave to meet her future. She was so young, surely she had yet lived out her life! There surely must be something good in store for her, whose whole happiness had been so brief, whose griefs had been so pitiful.

She reached the station nearest the farm of Leighlands, by the Midland train, about noon of the rainy, cheerless day, and engaged a hack to drive her to her journey's end, and was presently being borne at a good rate of speed toward her aunt's residence. And she would have given much to know what reception would be accorded her.

It was a roomy old frame house—that at Leighlands farm, with many features to redeem it from absolute plainness, its wide windows and ornamental roof imparting not only an aspect of dignity, but of picturesqueness.

The Leighs had dwelt upon this farm for three generations. They had been an honest, stolid race, obstinate and reserved, and had prided themselves upon their good name as a duke might pride himself upon his lineage. The Leighs had been wont to say in former years that not one of the family had ever disgraced the name—that the men were honest, temperate and industrious, the women virtuous, discreet and domestic.

But the present mistress of Leighlands was never heard to utter these boasts. She lived alone with her servants and worked as hard as they. She never visited a neighbor, never received guests, was unsocial to moroseness, rigid, repressed and unsmiling.

Upon this day, upon which Winifred set out to visit this home of her ancestors, Miss Evelyn Leigh sat sewing in an uncompromising straight-backed chair in the sitting-room at Leighlands. A feeble, depressed sort of fire was burning on



the open hearth. A dull, ugly carpet covered the floor of the room, and half a dozen slippery, black hair-cloth chairs and a hard, straight-backed sofa were ranged in mathematical precision against the walls. There were no curtains to soften the glare of the white shades, no easy-chairs about, not a rocker in the room, no tempting couch, no sign of luxury anywhere.

Miss Leigh did not look like one who cares for luxuries. She was tall, gaunt and ungainly, with a hard face, in which appeared no possibility of tenderness. Her eyes were cold and keen, her lips set in an unpleasant rigidity that was habitual, and even as she sat alone, as now, her manner was chilling and repelling.

Something in the dreariness without—and within, perhaps—depressed her, for, with a sudden movement, she laid aside her sewing, and rose and walked about the room, glancing through the window to see a hack entering the grounds as it drove up to the piazza.

"A hack!" she murmured to herself, "who should come to see me?"

As the thought passed through her mind she saw a slender young girl descend from the carriage, enter the piazza, and sound the knocker loudly with an imperious sort of summons.

Miss Leigh was uncomfortably surprised.

"It's a mistake, of course; no young woman should come to see me."

She heard the house door open and close, and then the unknown guest was ushered into the room by the old housekeeper.

The visitor was Winifred.

Her first act was to throw back the blue veil which she had tied over her little hat—revealing her pale, thin face with its glory of golden hair and lit up by her great vivid blue eyes, so full of a strange pleading. Its bright, young beauty, its sorrowful yearning might well have moved even so stern a nature as that of Evelyn Leigh, but she recoiled from Winifred as if she had displayed a Medusa head, recognizing her at once, though scarcely believing the evidence of her own senses.

"Are you Miss Evelyn Leigh?" Winifred asked in a low, sweet voice.

"I am, and who are you?" demanded Miss Leigh, hoarsely.

"I am your niece, Winifred Leigh."

A brief pause followed, while Winifred stood, still with that same look of pleading in her face. Miss Leigh uttered a strange sort of sound and then turned to the window. A moment later she turned back, and then Winifred shrunk before the cruel hardness of her eyes, the sternness that hardened all her features.

"You are mistaken," Miss Leigh said, coldly.

"I have no niece: you have no claims upon me."

"I know I have no claims upon your protection or your money, beyond the claim of common humanity which every human being has upon every other. I have not come to beg nor to claim relationship, and when you have answered a few questions I have come to ask, I shall go away as quietly as I have come."

"If you had possessed any delicacy," Miss Leigh said, with a sneer, "you would not have presumed to come here after receiving the letter

I sent some weeks since, and which doubtless you have read."

A faint color crept into Winifred's face.

"It is because of that letter that I have come," she said, quietly. "You made statements in it upon which I desire information."

Miss Leigh glanced scornfully out at the window in the direction of the carriage.

"I presume your husband is outside?"

"No, I am alone," Winifred answered, drearily. "My husband is dead."

"Dead! Dead, did you say?"

"Yes, some weeks."

"Dead! impossible! Then, why are you not in mourning?" Miss Leigh demanded, suspiciously.

"Why should I wear mourning when I do not grieve?" Winifred demanded, a passionate flush kindling all over her face. "I have no tears for him. I do not know that I ever loved him; but he was the first in all the world to profess love for me, and my heart warmed to him, and I thought I loved him when I married him—but if it was love, it is all burned out of my heart. I do not even honor his memory."

"Bless my soul," ejaculated Miss Leigh "are you mad? I don't doubt but you have got tired of him and have run away from him, or else you have entered into a conspiracy with him to delude me into giving you a home, into giving you my money, but it won't work; I am not to be imposed upon by any such shallow pretense as this."

A sullen fury began to gather in Miss Leigh's eyes, but the fury was directed against Winifred rather than against her husband.

"Why did you marry him?" she demanded.

"But I suppose your bad blood must show itself somehow. I presume you think you can blackmail me out of some money. Well, I might give you enough to keep you from starving, or at most to pay for your hack hire while you are waiting. How much do you want?"

She regarded the girl narrowly, and she saw that despite her youth, and her misfortune, the small sweet face was very brave, that the vivid eyes were fearless and unflinching, the mouth was spirited and resolute. She had been overwhelmed, but not crushed. She had been sore hurt but was not broken. She was not one to die or to sink under her cruel wounds, and the hidden possibilities of her nature for endurance were developing themselves with every moment of her life. As she spoke, Winifred put up her hand with a quick, haughty gesture.

"I have not come for money—you mistake me entirely," and her lips curled in a bitter smile. "I have come here to learn about myself, to learn all you know about me, I am a woman, and I have a right to know my history. Who was my mother?"

A strange silence followed, then came the answer in a low rasping tone:

"She was my sister Eleanor Leigh, cursed be her memory!"

"And who was my father?"

"I don't know; if I did, I'd hunt the world over but I'd have his heart's blood," Miss Leigh returned fiercely, a white anger on her face that was terrible to behold.



Winifred's face grew whiter than Miss Leigh had yet seen it.

"Tell me about my mother," she said; "tell me all, everything, about my mother."

Her tone was not entreaty, it was command—she had a right to know. Perhaps Miss Leigh recognized that right; perhaps she desired to add the last drop to the cup of humiliation she wished to press to the girl's lips, for in tones of intense bitterness she answered:

"Very well, I will tell you your mother's story."

And then, in a few terse words with her eyes so cold and cruel, and a look of stern reproach on her face she told Winifred the hitherto hidden story of her clouded young life; how her mother, fair young Eleanor Leigh, tiring of, and pining with, the quiet country life at Leighlands farm, had gone to the city when scarce as old as Winifred, to be taught drawing while boarding with acquaintances of the family, and then—never coming back again, although stories came of a handsome young fellow, rich and aristocratic, with whom Eleanor was often seen, and then, like a meteor in the sky, she suddenly disappeared and was not heard of until a year later, when Winifred, a baby of a few weeks old, was left at Leighlands farm with a feebly-scrawled message:

"Take care of my little Winifred for God's sake and for the sake of Eleanor."

After that came proof positive of Eleanor's death, and after that the convent boarding-school for Winifred until her entrance at Vellingham Brothers.

"And now you know your accursed story," Miss Leigh said, savagely, her face pale with long suppressed hatred. "You are not my niece; I repudiate all your claims. You have no relatives, no friends, no name, no home—"

"No anything," finished Winifred with the most intense bitterness. "True, yet nevertheless I live, and I must do the best I can with my life. I am not going to die because I am unhappy. People cannot die because life is distasteful or I should have died long before this. Perhaps even yet there may be something in store for me."

"Not here; not at Leighlands. As you have made your bed so must you lie," said Miss Leigh grimly.

"I expect to," flashed Winifred; "no matter what my need, I would not take a penny from you; but I have one demand to make. Give me whatever you have that belonged to my mother—whatever it may be, the most insignificant trifle—it is mine; give it to me."

Miss Leigh hesitated a moment and then walked over to a closet, and, unlocking a drawer therein, took from it a plain pasteboard box that set far back in a dark corner, which she handed to Winifred, who opened it to see a tuft of white cotton lying within, upon which reposed a bracelet of squares of flexible gold, a handsome, costly ornament, and an equally handsome gold medallion locket of a style worn twenty years before.

"They look as if they might have been heirlooms in a well-to-do family. They may be a clue to my father and I will wear them until I find him," Winifred said in a tone of determination.

"Do you think he would own you? Doubtless you mean to make him support you."

Winifred's eyes flashed, but she made no answer.

"In the bottom of that box, under the cotton, you will find your mother's pocket-book," Miss Leigh said; "there is money in it; how much I do not know exactly. I would not touch it to count it. It belongs to you with the rest."

Winifred reclosed the box and rose to depart.

"My business is ended here," she said, calmly. "Good-morning, madam."

Miss Leigh made no gesture to detain her—she hated the girl's very presence—nor could her youth and desolateness soften her hard heart. And so, with the little box of treasure, Winifred went off out of the home that had been her mother's, re-entered the carriage and drove away through the dreary rain.

## CHAPTER V.

### ON BROADWAY.

As Winifred passed out of the gates of Leighlands farm, and entered the public road, she pressed her face against the wet panes of the window of the hack and looked back upon the inhospitable house which had been her mother's home. What a refuge it might have been for her! What a peaceful life she might have lived beneath those chimneys!

But she did not weep nor despair. She was young and ignorant of the world, and in that very ignorance lay her strength. She was resolute, earnest and self-controlled. Her old life was over, her old self had perished with the shock of the great trouble that had passed over her, but she was not crushed, nor anxious to die. She had youth, and health, and a determination yet to make something of her life, to build a fair, fresh fabric on the ruins Hubert Lansdowne had made.

"I cannot go back to the old life in the store," she thought; "I cannot endure that—that is over and done with the rest, but I will do the best I can with the years that come to me, and some day, perhaps I may even go back to Leighlands and show my mother's sister that I am worthy of her respect."

It was late in the afternoon when Winifred arrived in New York. The rain was falling still, drearily and ceaselessly; the pavements were slippery, people plodded along under umbrellas, omnibus horses slipped, and here and there were to be seen prostrate and struggling. The street lamps were lighted, but through the misty rain they gave but a sickly glimmer.

Winifred fairly shivered under the depressing influence of the hour.

"It's a hard, grinding world," she said to herself wearily, "but there must be a brightness somewhere to balance all this dreariness and gloom. I wonder if there is more trouble ahead for me, even more than I have passed through with? But I must not give way to such thoughts; I will do the best I can."

The hack threaded the various streets, and finally halted before a dingy brick dwelling-house to which Winifred had directed the driver in Charles street—a respectable boarding-house of which Winifred had before heard,



and where she succeeded in securing a room and board without delay.

After the landlady had shown her her room and departed, and Winifred had with appetite eaten her supper, she returned to her room and took possession of the chair by the register, and gave herself up to deep and earnest thought.

"I am here in New York again, where my mother lived out that year of mystery and died. In New York, where I was born. In New York, where I lived so many years alone, where the trouble of my life has come upon me, and where the new, far more lonely life begins again! I wonder if my father lives in New York?—how strange I never thought of it before! And now I dedicate my existence, now and here, to the task of clearing my mother's name, and of finding my father, and in this task, to which I solemnly devote myself, I ask God to help me."

For a long while, Winifred sat there very grave and very silent, her mind busy with the great problems of her life. It was long past midnight when she went to bed, but during the hours that followed she did not sleep. Her thoughts were of the story she had heard from the lips of her relative at Leighlands, of her beautiful young mother whose end had been so terrible, and whose very memory was cursed by the sister who had loved her, and Winifred shed more tears that night for her poor young mother than she ever had shed for herself.

The morning dawned at last, and Winifred arose, though unrefreshed, and directly after breakfast set herself resolutely to the task of seeking employment.

She was so fortunate as to secure a position through an Intelligence Bureau as a nursery-governess, at a salary that barely sufficed to pay her expenses, but which she none the less thankfully accepted, spending her days in Mrs. Bond's school-room, her evenings over some dainty embroideries, an accomplishment which she had picked up years before, and which she now resolved to put to good account, if possible.

It was a hard and bitter life, but Winifred lived it cheerfully and without repining, and while she thus struggled, and toiled, and thought of her young husband as dead, he, exulting in the deceit he had practiced upon her, was going his way free as the air!

As she became more and more used to her life, Winifred found it inexpressibly dreary. She performed her duties as daily governess to the young Bonds with the most conscientious care and fidelity. She was punctual to her engagement in all weathers. She executed her embroideries which were left on sale at the different stores, but the sales were infrequent and scarcely repaid the cost of the material. In the great eager pressing throng of women, all prayerfully anxious to earn money, she felt herself in a measure crowded out, and grew to be thankful even for the small sum given her by Mrs. Bond in payment for the expenditure of her health and strength, her patience and earnest teaching.

She gave herself no relaxation, she had no amusements, but walked the weary treadmill of daily duty until her soul sickened of life.

Saturdays and Sundays constituted her only holidays. On Sunday she went to church and worshiped regularly, and there, and only there, forgot herself and her troubles, and a strange sweet sense of comfort would come to her, filling her soul with peace.

But what a life for a girl barely seventeen! A girl of rare, rich gifts, of a gay, bright nature, of an elastic, hopeful temperament! It was death in life. She longed for companionship, for human interests, for affection, and she had none.

But this life could not last forever. As it is always darkest just before the dawn, so was Winifred's life the darkest when there came a faint gleam of light into it.

It happened one Saturday afternoon that a desolate rain was falling, and Winifred's weekly walk in the Central Park would have been imprudent, and, her room being lonely and cheerless, she resolved to use her holiday hour in accomplishing a little business.

She had a destination when she started out into the wet streets—the store where her fancy-work was exhibited—and she walked briskly along unmindful of the rain. It was a long walk, but she was glad to be out of doors, and her physical weariness gave her no thought.

She built little air castles as she walked along. Perhaps her work was sold for a good price, and in that event, she could buy a newspaper, or, perhaps a certain book she had seen on a second-hand book stall just out of Fulton street.

But on reaching the store, she found her work was not sold and all her pitiful little plans vanished like smoke into thin air. She turned away, not disheartened—for she had become used to disappointments; and ceased to wonder at them—poor little Winifred, she would have wondered at good fortune—and took her way back again.

She did not walk briskly now. The air was thick and murky, and the rain seemed like a great gray veil. There were few ladies on the street; a few gentlemen were hurrying along, and a few working women walked along sheltered under umbrellas.

Winifred stood upon the corner of Broadway watching an opportunity to cross. Presently, a favorable opportunity occurred, and she assured herself that no danger threatened, although she was obliged to keep looking first one way and then another.

She was half-way across when two omnibuses and a great heavy dray came swiftly toward her. The drivers cried out to her furiously to "look out!" Winifred started to run. Her feet slipped on the muddy pavement, and she would have fallen headlong to the ground, beneath the very feet of the heavy horses, and been crushed to a shapeless mass, had not some one passing on the street witnessed her slip, and bounded forward like lightning to her rescue, quick as a flash seizing the nearest horse by the bit, rearing him upon his haunches and then, almost dragged Winifred to the sidewalk.

It had all transpired so quickly that Winifred had not realized her peril before it was past.

As her preserver led her upon the sidewalk,



he continued to support her, for her face was deathly white and she looked faint and terrified. But she had never looked lovelier than now, in her terror and distress. Her transparent complexion, her big vivid blue eyes glowing like stars, her tender exquisite mouth, all made up a picture, that her rescuer, at whom she had scarcely taken a glance, but enough of a glance to show her what a fine gentlemanly fellow he was—thought he had never seen anything half so lovely.

"Are you faint?" he asked; "shall I take you into the drug store just here?"

His voice was low and gentlemanly, and as Winifred looked at him more earnestly, she saw a slender, tall young fellow with a handsome face, whose whole bearing was that of a gentleman.

"I am not faint, I am not hurt," she answered tremulously. "I thank you very much for your great kindness."

She would have moved on, but he detained her gently.

"You tremble; I fear you are not able to walk. An empty *coupe* is just coming, allow me to send you home in it."

He signaled the carriage, and it drew up to the curb-stone.

Winifred demurred, declining the carriage, saying she could easily walk. He saw that she was not able to walk a single block unaided, that she had met with a nervous shock, and should get home as soon as possible, and he believed that poverty was the cause of her refusal to use the carriage.

"I shall go to my hotel in the *coupe*," he said courteously, "and I beg you will allow me to set you down at your own home. My name is Walter Holm. Allow me to perform the service in this emergency I would wish a stranger to perform for my sister."

He was so courteous and respectful that it was impossible that Winifred should experience any distrust of him. She felt weak and really ill, and she permitted him to assist her into the carriage.

"What address?" he asked courteously.

"Charles street, No. —."

Mr. Holm closed the carriage-door, and mounted the box with the driver. Winifred sunk back upon the seat and closed her eyes in faintness, until the carriage stopped. Then Mr. Holm alighted, came to the door and assisted Winifred up the steps, and rung the bell of the boarding-house.

"You are very kind," Winifred said. "I thank you more than I can express, Mr. Holm."

"Will you not tell me your name?" he asked courteously, yet with evident interest.

"My name is Winifred Leigh," the girl answered.

And then the servant opened the door. Holm waited until Winifred had vanished into the house; then he returned to the carriage and gave his own address to the driver.

"Winifred Leigh!" he repeated—"Winifred Leigh!" I never believed in love at first sight before, but that sweet, young face—that rare and splendid beauty have touched me with an electric thrill! I have found my destiny at last. I shall marry this beautiful Winifred

Leigh, or"—and with the solemnity of perfect conviction, he added—"I shall go to my grave unmarried!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN UNEXPECTED CLEW.

WINIFRED made her way up-stairs to her own room. No one came near her, and for an hour or more, she lay quietly resting after her adventure.

"I had a narrow escape," she thought with a shudder. "I shall remember Mr. Walter Holm while I live."

Winifred sighed, why, she could not say. She gave little thought in these days to the brief promise of happiness her life had held, or to the bridegroom she had believed to be dead, and he had vanished from her life, leaving no pleasant memories, while she strove rather to forget him. But now, she thought of him, yet only to contrast him with this gentleman who had rescued her, who had seemed to consider his action a matter of course, and not worthy of commendation.

It was growing dark, but Winifred continued to sit without lights, until presently the landlady tapped on her door.

Winifred rose and placed a chair for her immediately upon her entrance, and the woman took possession of it, her ample figure overflowing it in all directions. It was a purely business call which the landlady made upon Winifred. She was about giving up keeping boarders, and having a particularly friendly liking for Winifred, had come to tell her she had bespoken a place for her, with a friend of hers who also kept boarders, living not far from where she lived.

"If I must leave you, I shall be most grateful to you for finding for me any other honest shelter," Winifred said.

"I am glad, then, that I spoke to Mrs. James about a room for you. She is a good, honest woman, as ever lived. She was a housekeeper for many years in many good families, and laid up enough money to furnish her a far better house than this. She knows many rich families, and may be able to give you a better situation than your present one with Mrs. Bond. I don't know of a better place for you, Miss Leigh, and if you say so, we will walk over this evening."

Accordingly after supper, Winifred and her landlady went around to inspect the new place.

The house in question was but a few blocks away, and was a respectable brick dwelling of four stories. They were admitted by a servant who wore a white cap and apron, and who ushered them into a pleasant parlor, while she went in quest of her mistress.

Mrs. James, the boarding-house keeper, a spare dignified woman, past middle age, presently appeared and the ceremony of introduction was performed.

The gaslight fell full upon Winifred's face as Mrs. James looked at her, and the girl with gentle courtesy acknowledged the introduction—while Mrs. James stared at her with wide-open eyes almost as if the girl had been a ghost.

"Who—who—did you say?" she asked. "What did you say the name is?"



"Miss Leigh," Winifred returned gently.

"I beg pardon," said Mrs. James, "but you remind me of a young lady I knew many years ago. I was her housekeeper, poor dear. Your eyes are the very picture of hers."

A sudden agitation made Winifred's heart beat wildly, but she kept her voice calm and steady as she asked the question:

"How long ago was that, Mrs. James?"

"It's eighteen years since I kept house for her, it's a little over seventeen since I left her."

A strange sense of suffocation came over Winifred. Was it possible that she had so accidentally stumbled upon a clew to her mother's secret history? She wondered if Providence had not led her to this house, and whether in the keeping of this very woman, upon whom the sight of her had created such an impression, might not be the solution of the mystery of Eleanor Leigh's life?

Accompanied by Mrs. James, Winifred was shown the room which had been bespoken for her, and for which she paid the first week's board in advance, requesting that she might take possession on the next day.

"I hope I shall be a pleasant reminder to you of the lady you once served, Mrs. James," she said smilingly yet eager and anxious. "Were you fond of her?"

"I was fond of her. She was as sweet a spoken lady as I ever saw, and there was that dignity about her that showed that she was a real lady. She looked for all the world like you, Miss Leigh, but her hair was different in color. The resemblance is curious, but not at all uncommon. It may be, though, you are some relation to her—her name was Roberts."

"I don't know any one of that name," Winifred returned. "Did you know her Christian name?"

"I heard her husband call her Eleanor sometimes."

Winifred trembled and her face fairly whitened, for she knew now, beyond all doubt, that she was on the right track; that the lady whom Mrs. James had served was her own dead young mother! Yet she held in her emotions with a stern and rare self-control.

"Was she married, did you say, Mrs. James?"

"Yes. Did I not say she was Mrs. Roberts? Her husband fairly worshiped her, but he was as proud as Lucifer, and they quarreled awfully at times, but he always made peace and then petted her until she was good-humored again. I was paid a good salary, and it was to my interest to keep my eyes and ears well closed, but there was something wrong about them, and one night she had a quarrel with him, and fled out of the house like a mad creature, and I never saw her again. I often wonder whether she is living or dead."

"What a strange story!" Winifred said tremblingly. "Did Mr. Roberts disappear too? What did he do after her disappearance?"

"He kept up the house for six months, and came every day to see if she had come back again, but she never came, and then he gave up the house, and dismissed the servants, and went away quite broken-hearted. And I never have seen him from that day to this."

The next day Winifred entered into posses-

sion of her new home, and while arranging her little nicknacks about her room, Mrs. James tapped upon the door, asking if she might be of any service. Winifred gave her admittance and begged her to be seated, and busying herself in arranging her trinkets on her dressing-case, it occurred to her that she would show the jewels that Miss Evelyn Leigh had given her, that belonged to her mother, to Mrs. James, to see if she would recognize them. She stepped forward to exhibit them, and Mrs. James gave an indifferent, then a curious glance—and then uttered a strange exclamation.

"Have you ever seen them before?" Winifred asked eagerly.

"Seen them? a hundred times. They were hers, Mrs. Roberts's. How came they in your possession, Miss Leigh? Her husband gave them to her as a wedding present—for she told me so herself."

Winifred stood trembling before her.

"Is there no mistake? Are you sure they are the same?"

"Sure? I could swear to that bracelet in any court in the land! I have fastened it on her wrist many a time! I was right, your likeness to her means something. Miss Leigh, what relation was Mrs. Roberts to you?"

"She was my mother."

"What! She was your mother?"

"Yes, I must have been born only a short time after she fled from her home."

"And she, where is she?"

"She died soon after my birth."

Mrs. James wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, while amazement, and a host of other emotions struggled for the mastery. Then curiosity ruled.

"How is it you do not bear your father's name, Miss Leigh?"

"What was his name? Was it Roberts? Was his real name Roberts?"

Mrs. James shook her head thoughtfully.

"I could not tell you, but I think not."

"Then I will keep the name my mother bore in her innocent girlhood. I am glad to know she thought herself his wife. She never told her story to her kindred, and they believe the very worst of her—her own sister curses her memory to this very day!" Winifred said passionately. "I hope that Mr. Roberts lives—I will not call him father—and that some day I will meet him face to face. There is a just God, and some day I know I *shall* see him and know him, and he shall know me also."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SWEET TEMPTATION.

WINIFRED'S life was no longer without an object. She had discovered the clew to her mother's hidden history. She knew now that her mother; whose name lay under foulest reproach, had been known during one year before her birth as Mrs. Roberts, and had been the honored mistress of her own home. Now, to discover "Mr. Roberts," became the leading purpose of Winifred's ruined and lonely existence.

"It may be," she told herself bitterly when she found herself alone that first evening in her new quarters in Mrs. James's boarding-house



—“that I have lived over again her bitter experience, that my life has been but a repetition of her own. Perhaps she married a man who tired of her. Perhaps she, too, never knew his real name. It seems clear that he ill-used her, and that she, discovering his true character, and learning that he had imposed upon her, fled from him as from her worst enemy.

That first evening of her abode in her new home she did not go down to supper, and Mrs. James went to her rooms directly afterward to insist upon her spending the evening socially in the parlors.

“I so dread meeting strangers,” Winifred said to the kindly invitation.

“But my boarders will not be strangers after you have met them, remember. I can vouch for every one of them—they are very nice people indeed, and some of them have been with me for years. With one exception they are all what I might call friends of mine—he is a new boarder and one of the handsomest gentlemen I ever saw in my life. He came only this morning. He applied to your old landlady for board and she sent him, as she sent you, to me. I particularly want to make you feel at home, so will you not come down?”

The invitation was so kindly given, that Winifred was constrained to accept it, and after Mrs. James's departure, made her toilet anew, yet almost repenting of her concession. She put on her best dress, a black silk at whose throat a soft frill of lace fell caressingly, and for the first time wore her mother's jewelry.

She looked her nature, frank, brave, and impetuous, but generous, sweet and truthful to the core, as she stood before her mirror ready to go down.

“Although my dress is black, there is not a sign of mourning about it, and not a thought of mourning in my heart for my dead husband,” she thought. “How completely he has passed out of my life. I think now I should not care for him if he should come to me as I stand here.”

She went down-stairs toward the parlor, where Mrs. James met her at the door and escorted her into the room where the boarders were gathered about the table, to whom Mrs. James presented her—and to the new boarder, “the handsomest gentleman,” Mrs. James had ever seen, as he emerged from behind his newspaper near the fire.

One look at the handsome high-bred face was enough for Winifred—she recognized him as Mr. Walter Holm, and as she greeted him with a warm smile she wondered perplexedly how it happened that he had become an inmate of the same house with herself.

He did not take pains to enlighten her. The truth was, that her face had haunted him ever since the moment he had last seen her. He was not one to fall in love with every pretty face—indeed he had never loved any woman other than his mother, but his heart had been touched by Winifred. He had resolved to know her better. There was but one way by which he could make her acquaintance, and that was to live under the same roof with her. He had accordingly left his pleasant quarters at the hotel and for Winifred's sake had sought board at the humble house at the door of which he

had left her, but that lady had sent him to Mrs. James, informing him with the utmost unsuspecting that she had sent several of her favorite boarders to Mrs. James, and would also cordially recommend him to the same place.

Holm had made haste to call upon Mrs. James, had shown her unexceptional references, had engaged her only vacant room, and installed himself into it without an hour's delay.

And now he was rewarded by more than a glimpse of Winifred. He was to spend the evening in her society, and had to look forward to the prospect of spending many more in the same manner.

If he had admired Winifred at their first peculiar meeting, that admiration deepened now into something warmer as he marked how well-bred she was, how quietly self-possessed, how gentle and perfect were her manners. Her beauty, too, was even greater than he had thought, and long before the evening was over Walter Holm had fallen hopelessly in love with the wronged, deserted young wife of Hubert Lansdowne.

At ten o'clock the little circle broke up, and Winifred went up to her room with a new glow at her heart, whose strange warmth permeated her whole being.

If Hubert had only been like Mr. Holm she thought, and then with a vivid flush checked the thought.

While Walter Holm went up to his room enraptured with the progress he had made that evening with Winifred's acquaintance.

“She's an angel,” he said to himself with enthusiasm; “I must know more about her. She is a governess, alone in the world Mrs. James says, and of good family. She is too young, too beautiful to struggle alone with the world. Already I love her with all my heart and soul—the dainty, proud, sweet little girl. I shall win her with what haste I can, and make a little home for her, and guard her and watch over her, and cherish her as she deserves. There is no need of delay if I can but win her. If I can only win her love I shall not permit her to drudge much longer.”

The acquaintance between them grew rapidly and prospered. They met almost every evening in Mrs. James's parlors in company with their fellow boarders, and their interest in each other deepened daily.

A week of such intercourse is worth more than a month of chance meetings in society, and at the end of two weeks the young couple were better acquainted with each other's tastes and character and dispositions than many a pair after years of courtship.

Holm was a good judge of character, and he studied Winifred closely, with a constantly-growing admiration that rapidly verged on love. He saw she was pale and overworked, and that the fair young face showed signs of pain and care. He knew that her life was lonely, that she had borne much sorrow, and yet her face was always sweet and sunny when she appeared in the parlor, and her sympathies were always warm and quick and true.

Holm's judgment approved his love, which was now becoming an absorbing passion. He



fully determined to woo and win Winifred for his wife if possible, but he did not wish to be too precipitate in his advances and so defeat his own purposes. He looked forward to a marriage with her after months of acquaintance, during which she should learn to rely upon him, and to trust him with a love like that he felt for her; but circumstances conspired to hasten his avowal—one evening when all the other boarders were elsewhere engaged, and he found Winifred alone in the parlor, busy writing some invitations for a juvenile party at Mrs. Bond's, her sweet face so pale and tired as she bowed over her task, that his very soul yearned over her with a deep and ineffable anxiety that was tenderness itself.

"You work too hard, Miss Leigh," he said with a tenderness of voice that made her start and tremble involuntarily; "this life of struggle and toil is too much for you. How would you like to turn your back upon it all, upon Mrs. Bond, her troublesome children, even your lonely room here at Mrs. James's, and be the happy queen of some sunny little cottage where you would be loved and honored and cherished?"

"Happiness like that will never come to me," Winifred said sorrowfully.

"We have not known each other many weeks," Holm said, gently detaining her hand from further writing, and clasping it closely in his, as it lay upon the table, "yet we know each other well. My income from my profession is small, but it is a fixed income of over a thousand dollars a year. I know that you are alone in the world. I love you, Winifred. I have loved you from the first day I saw you. I cannot offer you the wealth you would grace, but I can offer you a loving heart, the devotion of my whole future life, and the sunny little home I have pictured. Winifred, Winifred, my darling, will you be my wife?"

Her hand fluttered in his like an imprisoned bird, and then she drew it away with a low, moaning cry.

"No, no," she murmured. "I cannot. Oh, Mr. Holm! You have offered me heaven, and I must refuse it."

He still held her hand in that firm, strong pressure, and held it closely. He looked straight at her with that tender, compelling glance of his.

"Do you dislike me, Winifred?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Could you not learn to love me?" he asked gently.

She was silent. He pressed the question gently, and with an infinite tenderness that would have won the heart of an enemy.

At last, in a trembling whisper, the answer came.

"Yes," she said, so low he had to bend his head to catch the sound. "Oh, Mr. Holm, I—love you now."

There was a silence of a few minutes that fell between them, and then, in a voice whose happiness smote upon Winifred like a blow, he spoke to her again.

"My darling, thank God for this! How soon may I claim you for my wife?"

"Not at all, never," she answered, her voice

full of misery. "Oh, Mr. Holm, it cannot be! I must go my own way, and you will forget me by and by. I shall never marry."

"You do not know me as well as I thought you did," he said proudly; "you do not know what a strong, passionate nature mine is. My love for you is the one love of my life. You say you love me; then, I defy the world to part us, and certainly I shall not heed your refusal of me, my little darling. By right of your love for me, you belong to me—remember that, always. And by that right, I intend to marry you at once and take care of you. So, little girl, let me hear no more feeble protestations."

Winifred uttered a low, choking sob in answer to his happy laugh.

"You don't understand me, Mr. Holm. I am in earnest. I cannot marry you."

"At least, Winifred," he said, and she knew he was smiling, although she dared not trust herself to look at him—"at least, Winifred, you will give me the chance to combat your argument against our marriage. Is there anything about me to which you object?"

"The fault is not in you—it is in myself," she said desperately. "You have a right to know my reasons, and I will tell you. You are a gentleman, and gentlemen think so much of family and good birth. I—I—don't know—that I—am well-born."

"Is that all?" Holm asked. "What a mountain you make out of a molehill, my darling! It is you whom I love, not your genealogical tree. That objection won't weigh with a feather."

She expected he would draw back from her; but his tenderness did not vary, his support of her did not waver. She remembered how Hubert Lansdowne had received the story of her birth, and how could she help contrasting Walter Holm's loving generosity with the terrible wrath of the man who had but just led her away from the altar?

"You see," Holm said gayly, "that you will not be rid of me so easily. Little Winifred, I love you and shall not let you go from me. You are alone in the world. You must come to me at once, and while I care for you, you must brighten my life. To-morrow I shall make arrangements for an immediate wedding. Tell me, my darling, that I am to have my own way in this matter."

"Give me a little time to think of it," Winifred said, tremblingly. "I will give you an answer to-night."

Holm noticed that she looked strangely wan and pallid, and that her blue eyes had a look in them that was almost wild. He would have spoken further with her, but there was no opportunity, for at that moment one or two of the boarders entered the room.

Shortly after, her task completed, Winifred retired to her room, where, turning the light down dimly and locking the door, she knelt upon the hearth-rug, pale and miserable, her head bowed low upon a chair.

For a long time she knelt thus, shivering now and again. She lived over and over the events of the evening. The passionate tenderness, the masterful will, the earnest, exacting love of Holm, were all reviewed with an anguish that exceeded any she had ever known.



"If I had only known him a few little weeks ago?" she said to herself. "I love him—I love him! and I know now that I never loved Hubert Lansdowne. Oh! why was I permitted to marry Hubert, and so ruin my whole life—in one moment of folly to utterly ruin my hopes of happiness?—for a woman deserted as I was deserted, cast aside as I was cast aside, is not fit to be any man's wife. Mr. Holm must know all the truth, and then he will see that I have decided wisely, that I cannot be his wife."

She brought out her writing materials and sat down beside the table to write out as briefly as she could the sad story of her life.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AS FROM THE DEAD.

It was a hard and bitter task indeed, that upon which Winifred had entered. She had intended to write out the entire story of her life; but she found her wounds had been too deep and recent to probe them to their depths. Again and again she began her letter to Walter Holm, and again and again flung page after page aside.

"Why should I write out a minute statement?" she asked herself, wearily. "It will only be to harrow up my soul to no good. I will tell him simply the outline of my history, and it will be enough to turn him from me, as Hubert turned, and with better cause, for I never deceived Hubert, never, and Mr. Holm will believe I have deceived him. I am known to him as Miss Leigh and I suppose I must write the letter that will tell him what I am; that will make him hate and despise me."

After considerable effort she produced a letter telling him all her sad story—how her husband had deserted her, all the pitiful story of her mother's life, the cloud on her own, and her ignorance of even her own name.

The letter did not satisfy Winifred, so feeble did it seem in contrast to the intensity of the feeling to which her mind and heart had been wrought, but she could not rewrite it.

With the letter in her hand, sealed and addressed, she stole quietly down the stairs to the floor below and to the door of Mr. Holm's room, under which she thrust the letter, and then flitted back to her own room.

During that evening Holm had remained in the parlors, expecting Winifred's appearance, and at last despairing of her coming, he retired to his own room. As he opened the door and passed in, his foot struck against her letter. He picked it up and locked the door, and sat down in an easy-chair, with a pleased and happy smile. He knew from whom the letter had come, and before he broke the seal he kissed the address with passionate, reverent tenderness.

"She has kept her promise and given me my answer to-night," he thought, rapturously.

Then he read the letter, not once, but again and again. It is needless to say that Winifred's revelation was very bitter to him. Her cheeks had burned in writing the letter, and his burned in reading it—but in admiration of her bravery, her truthfulness, her simple honesty. How easily she might have kept all this from him if she had so wished! It was the latter part of the letter that hurt him most deeply. A widowed

bride, and the widowed bride of a man whose real name she said she did not know!

For an hour or more Holm gave himself up to his thoughts. It is enough to say that Winifred's letter seemed to him full of bitterest pathos, and that he never had loved her so well as now. His soul overflowed with a passionate tenderness for her. Winifred was pure and sweet and good, endowed with rare beauty and talents, and he loved her with a passion that amazed himself. Give her up? Never! What mattered her origin? What mattered it if she had been the bride of a scoundrel? He pitied and loved her all the more for what she had suffered.

"My poor little darling!" he whispered to himself. "Is it too late to send her a message? I cannot bear that she should think that I have let her go out of my life as she has bidden me go. I cannot bear she should think so even until morning."

He took the letter she had written him and laid it on the fire, and then went to his desk and wrote with a firm hand an answer to her letter—a firm, rapid hand, that was an index to his firm, strong character.

"MY POOR LITTLE WINIFRED:—

"I have read your letter and burned it—so let your past perish from your mind. We will never allude to it again. You shall begin a new life with me, my darling, and if God permits, it shall be all sunshine. But, if shadows do obscure our path, we will still tread it together. My darling, I shall not let you go from me—did you think I would? Tomorrow I shall take your life into my own keeping.

"W. H."

Then he went quietly up to Winifred's door, and thrust her letter beneath it, as she had done a little while before at his door, and then returned to his room.

He did not sleep that night, but hour after hour sat beside his fire, wakeful and deeply thoughtful.

"I shall not give her up, whatever her scruples or reluctance! I have found my pearl of price, and I shall hold her fast. If it were only morning, that I might speak with her—that I might comfort her!"

The night wore away, at last, and morning dawned. Mr. Holm made his toilet for the day, listening to every sound in the hall, every step on the stair, with a hope of receiving some further message from Winifred. But none came. The breakfast hour came and passed, and then Holm began to think it strange he did not see or hear from Winifred.

"She may intend to slip away from me, to force my freedom back upon me, but she does not know with whom she is dealing," he thought, and a smile lit up his handsome face—"she does not know me yet! When she confessed that she loved me, she confessed that she belonged to me by a divine right, and nothing but her own will can take her from me."

He heard a light step on the stair at that moment. Then a little note came softly under his door, and the step continued to descend the lower stairs. Holm caught the letter hastily up, and found it contained but this line:

"I cannot take advantage of your generosity. Spare us both the pain of another meeting."



As he had apprehended, Winifred was already in the street on her way to Mrs. Bond's; and crushing the letter in his pocket, he hurried down-stairs, caught his hat off the rack and proceeded after her.

She was but little in advance of him, and the weary droop in her slender figure told plainly enough of her sleeplessness, her anxiety. Hurrying his pace slightly he was soon at her side, and very quietly drew her arm within his. She looked up with a low cry, and would have drawn her hand away but that he held it in a firm clasp, that paid no heed to her struggle.

"You are on your way to Mrs. Bond's?"

"Yes."

"I shall go with you, and will wait for you outside. Your stay need be but brief. All that you need say is that you resign your position."

As he spoke, he bent his head to look into her face, and he saw how weary and sorrowful she looked.

"Did you find my note this morning?" she asked.

"Yes. Did you think, Winifred, that I should let your girlish scruples come between us now? What more can be said between us? Let me teach you to forget that men are sometimes base and cruel—let me teach you that you need never speak or think of him who treated you so basely. We will forget that he ever lived. Your girlish fancy for him was not love, you said."

"Oh, no! oh, no! I scorn his memory, and despise myself that I ever fancied that I loved him. But, Mr. Holm, I am not a suitable wife for you."

"Permit me to be the judge of that," he said smiling. "I accept all the responsibility, you need not even think in the matter. And, my darling, I now lay my first command upon you. You will be married to me to-morrow."

And Winifred ceased her protestations. It was so pleasant to submit to this stronger will, to be led in the way of happiness even against her convictions.

But, as she yielded her will to that of her lover, a strange presentiment of evil clouded her spirit—a presentiment she was able to explain in that bitter afterward.

Mr. Holm left her at Mrs. Bond's door. He returned half an hour afterward, but even then, was obliged to wait some little time before Winifred came down the steps, her cheeks flushed and an indignant sparkle in her eyes.

"I could hardly get away," she said with a laugh, "Mrs. Bond was not willing to lose me at all, and not satisfied with reproaching me with my ingratitude in wishing to leave her, she has kept my month's salary in place of the notice I should have given her."

"Happily, your acquaintance with her is ended," Holm said, and then they parted and Winifred proceeded to spend the spare time in a little shopping tour, using the money her aunt Evelyn had given her as being her mother's, two hundred and sixty dollars she had never broken in upon.

"It will seem as if my dear mother gave me my wedding outfit," she thought tenderly. "I

will buy something new, for I want to look my very best to-morrow. I want to look beautiful to Mr. Holm."

With her money in her hand Winifred felt rich. She drove to an establishment on Sixth avenue, and made her purchases, several sets of fine dainty undergarments, a stylish little hat of terra cotta plush trimmed with ostrich tips to match; a costume of terra cotta silk, with a plush jacket, for her wedding toilet, and a costume of deep myrtle cloth, with a felt hat *en suite*, for her traveling dress. She purchased a few sets of linen lingerie, one set of pretty laces, two pairs of walking boots, and gloves for her dresses, and then returned to Charles street in a carriage with her new acquisitions, which one of the servants carried up stairs to her room, by whom Winifred sent for Mrs. James, to listen to her announcement and explanations.

That evening Mr. Holm returned earlier than usual, and shortly after his arrival he sent a little sealed note to Winifred asking her to come down to him in the parlor, a summons she promptly obeyed, her lover meeting her at the door, happy and impatient.

"All the arrangements are made, my darling. I have seen a clergyman and we will go quietly to his house to-morrow at eleven o'clock, and be married. Are you satisfied dear? Are you as happy as I am, I wonder? And do you know, my darling, that although we are betrothed and are to be married to-morrow, you have never yet called me by my first name, never yet even given me a kiss?"

He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face into his full view. It was a shy, happy face, radiant with its bright rare beauty, and lighted by its trustful, loving eyes. The look she gave him was a caress, but the kiss he had to take for himself, for she offered none.

The next morning at half-past ten the carriage conveyed them to the clergyman's residence, and all things being in readiness the ceremony proceeded without delay. And as the voice of the minister sounded on her ears, Winifred seemed to live over again the fatal marriage ceremony at Saint Philip's when another stood at her side, another vowed to love and cherish her till death. And that other was dead, and she but a few months a widow, was again a bride.

She made her answers clearly, as did Holm. She listened to the prayer, to the address; she was married and nothing had happened! For her presentiment of evil had deepened into a great dread of impending calamity. She had feared, she knew not what. But all was well. She was safely sheltered at last in a good man's love, and at last, she had a name rightfully her own.

The little ceremony over and the clergyman and his wife having offered their congratulations, they proceeded to the carriage to be driven back to Charles street, where the wedding breakfast which had been ordered by Holm was to be given in honor of the occasion.

As they passed out of the hall Holm's face wore a gravely tender look.

"My wife, my wife," he whispered as he



paused to button her little jacket closer; "you belong to me now, and I shall shelter you from every rude wind. Speak to me. Never call me Mr. Holm again, but whisper to me, darling, what I have never yet heard you say—say 'Walter, my husband.'"

Her face crimsoned and her eyes drooped, but she softly repeated the words he desired to hear.

He drew her arm in his and led her down the steps to the pavement, while the cabman sprung down at the sight of them and opened the door of the carriage.

And at the same moment a gentleman and lady passed on the opposite sidewalk and gazed casually at the little group on the pavement—the gentleman Hubert Lansdowne, who was looking at his deserted young wife who believed him dead, and who in looking, grew as white as marble. The lady, one to whom he was engaged to be married, Miss Mordaunt, niece and heiress of Judge Mordaunt, one of New York's brightest legal luminaries.

Holm did not notice him, the driver having addressed him at that moment. He helped his young wife into the carriage, sprung in himself, and as they drove slowly away he turned to Winifred with some whispered word of love.

She did not reply to him. Her figure seemed strangely relaxed. Her head had drooped suddenly to her breast. In alarm he lifted it and looked upon her face. She was in a deadly faint, and a look of horror was frozen into her half-open eyes.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A BLOW ON THE HEART.

As Walter Holm looked at his bride it seemed to him that she was dead, so white and ghastly did she lie there in her unconsciousness, with that frozen sort of horror in her half-open eyes. He gathered her figure to him in a sort of frenzy and shouted to the coachman to drive faster, to drive for life. Rapidly as the carriage whirled along the minutes seemed to Holm like hours. He groaned in anguish, he called upon Winifred to awaken, to tell him that she was not dead; he put his hand on her pulse, on her heart, but could feel no answering throb. A great despair came upon him, and as the carriage at last drew up before the door of their boarding-house, and the servant all smiles and welcome opened the door, he alighted, gathered his bride up in his arms carried her into the parlor and laid her upon the sofa, while the coachman hurried in quest of a physician.

Holm chafed her hands and poured brandy between her white lips, the servant brought ammonia and administered it, bathing the cold white temples, and after a few moments of the heroic treatment Winifred gave a sort of gasping sigh and opened her eyes.

There was a look in them which Holm could not at all understand. With a sort of shiver, she looked past him, as if expecting to see some one behind him, and as Mrs. James came rushing into the room, all exclamations and questions, she looked at her vaguely, and with a shrinking sort of terror, neither Mrs. James nor Holm

could understand—as if somehow she had expected to see some other enter.

Holm explained to Mrs. James that Winifred had fainted on entering the carriage at the clergyman's door; and his face was strangely set and stern in its awful anxiety, and Mrs. James was standing beside her with a grave anxious face, when the physician appeared and was conducted into Winifred's presence. Holm briefly told what had occurred so far as he knew, Winifred answered the few questions, put to her, opened her eyes tiredly, but gave no clew to the cause of her illness.

"She has evidently fainted from over emotion" announced the physician puzzledly. "It seems as if she had received some sudden and terrible shock, but of course, under the circumstances, that is impossible; I advise that she be put in her own bed, and left to rest for an hour or so, I think when she awakens, she will be quite herself again. At present, she seems a little dazed and frightened."

The physician took his leave and Holm carried his bride up to her own old room and laid her upon her own bed. Her old trunk stood packed and strapped ready for removal, the new one was opened ready to receive her wedding dress. Her traveling sachel, Holm's wedding gift, stood on the table, giving the room the desolate and abandoned look a room has when one is about to leave it for a long time—perhaps forever.

Holm went out, leaving Mrs. James to disrobe Winifred and to put her to bed. They gave her the quieting draught which the physician had left and then went softly out leaving her to herself. Mrs. James returned to her duties down stairs, but Holm sat outside Winifred's door watchfully listening and anxious.

Alone with her thoughts, Winifred for the first time dared to give way to her anguish. She knew that she had looked upon the face of Hubert Lansdowne that day. Despite the evidence she had had of his death, she knew that he still lived. But what actual evidence had she had of his death? Only the word of his friend Marshall and that was worthless; only the slips cut from a newspaper, and how easily deception can creep into newspaper reports. Hitherto innocent and unsuspecting as a little child, Winifred's perceptions suddenly quickened to abnormal acuteness. The whole thing had been a trick. Hubert Lansdowne was not dead, but he had chosen to rid himself of her, and make her believe him dead. She knew that accursed truth now, and plainly and thoroughly as if he had confessed it to her.

As she lay there, her wild eyes peered out into the room with a look of perfect terror in them for as yet, the quieting draught had no power over her. Every nerve was strung to its utmost tension. She was well nigh crazed between her fear and her woe, as she realized that she was the wife of two husbands.

She shed no tears—hers was a grief too deep for such expression. With wide eyes and ashen face, she lay on her pillow for hours, breathing hard and heavily, her soul passing through a perfect tempest of anguish. She did not speak or moan or sob, she did not



even pray; everything about her was like the very blackness of darkness—and the one thought of which she was conscious was—if she might but die.

While, outside her door, patient and watchful, Holm sat waiting for some summons from within. As the day wore on, and Mrs. James now and then crept half-way up the stairs to whisper a word of comfort to him, Holm could bear the suspense no longer. He turned the door-handle softly, and entered, moving silently toward the bed.

The medicine which the doctor had left for Winifred had required to be unusually powerful to meet the state of her suppressed yet terrible excitement. It had taken effect now, and she lay in a dreamless sleep, awfully like to death, so white, so still, so marble-like that Holm hushed his breath as he looked down upon her.

"She looks like a flower that has been beaten down by a hail-storm," he thought. "What can this trouble be that has come to her? What is this mystery that has come between us? Has she discovered that she does not love me? I will not believe it. What then is the mystery?"

But he could not penetrate it, long though he stood there watching her deathlike sleep, with his very soul yearning over her.

"She will tell me all when she awakens," he told himself, and then bent over and kissed her lightly. Then, fearing lest he should disturb her, he crept softly out again and took up his old position in the hall. The afternoon grew late. The halls grew full of shadows, and at last, looking anxious and troubled, Mrs. James came up to light the gas.

"You will get your death of cold, sitting here in the draught," she whispered, "and you have not had a blessed mouthful to eat since breakfast. Come down and have a cup of tea. Do you know what time it is? It's nearly six o'clock, and you won't be able to stir for Washington to-day."

"No," he said quietly, "we shall have to wait until to-morrow. Mrs. Holm is asleep, and may not waken for hours. I believe when she does waken, she will be quite herself."

Holm at first declined Mrs. James's persuasions to come below and have something to eat, but she was so urgent in her entreaties that at last he reluctantly consented, and accompanied her to the dining-room below for a cup of tea. He had eaten nothing since morning, and the refreshment was not unrequired by him.

He was not absent from his post fifteen minutes, yet, during that fifteen minutes, that happened which changed the whole current of his and Winifred's life.

He had hardly descended when Winifred awakened. There was no start, no slow return to the realization of existence, but sudden resumption of life just where she had dropped it. The same desolate look was in her eyes that had been there when she closed them, and now one might have seen that the edge of her sufferings seemed somewhat blunted. A stony calm seemed to hold her in its cold despair. She arose mechanically from the bed, and as mechanically dressed herself, with hands that seemed too stiff to perform their office.

"Poor Walter!" she whispered softly, "it will come so hard upon him! If they knew, they would send me to State's prison, and in any case, I am not Walter's wife—I know I am not. I am Hubert Lansdowne's wife, and Hubert Lansdowne is alive! If I might but sink out of this life as a stone sinks into the water, and leaves no trace behind. Walter would mourn for me, but no disgrace would darken his life then. To die now! Oh, to die now!"

She set her pale lips together in a straight line and hastened with her dressing. The garments she had worn that day she resumed one by one with the exception of her wedding-dress. Her traveling-costume of myrtle-green cloth lay upon a chair ready to put on—her purse, hat, handkerchief and gloves in the pocket ready for use. She put the costume on, outside jacket and all, and donned her hat, which lay on the table enshrouded in its vail. These articles of attire had been made ready before going forth that morning for the journey of the evening, the bridal journey—but what journey was this upon which she was now bound?

She felt feverish and cold, by turns, but by the time she was dressed, a strange excitement began to burn in her veins, and her eyes flashed and glowed with the fire of fever. She laughed at the light of reflection in her glare, in a strange sort of a way, and then started at the sound of her voice.

"I wonder if I am going to be ill again? My head feels so strangely," she thought bewilderedly. "I have had such a hard life, such a hard life, would it be wrong to end it? I wish I were lying dead under the cold waters of the river—the river is a ready-made grave for women with such lives as mine has been."

She laughed again, that low wild sound, and again started, shuddering and frightened as she looked over her shoulder with peering eyes; and, half-delirious with the terrors of the situation that pressed so frightfully upon her, with all her perceptions bewildered and dazed, she only knew she wanted to die.

She opened the door softly and glided downstairs like a ghost. She listened a moment at the lower floor in the hope of hearing Holm's voice amid the murmur of subdued voices in the parlor, and then, she opened the street door, and slipped out into the dusk, and instinctively took the direction of the river.

## CHAPTER X.

### SAVED—TO WHAT?

THE traffic of the day was over, and a mighty hush brooded over the streets of New York. A few stars shone dimly in the sky, a few lights gleamed from the boats on the river. There was a dash of wet in the air. The sky was darkening, and the wind was rising. It was a night for home comfort and safe shelter.

The last strokes of the midnight bells were echoing through the air, when a young girl walked slowly down the pier at Desbrosses street, her head drooping, her figure bent with weariness.

This girl was Winifred.

She had wandered about all these hours since she had left Mrs. James's house intent only



upon reaching the river, and had gained it at last. She walked slowly down the pier and sunk down upon the side of the bridge, her strength utterly spent.

"I will wait a moment," she said drearily; "before I die, I ought to pray to God to have mercy on my soul."

"To pray!" it was the first time since the great horror had fallen upon her that she had thought of prayer. Ah, she had not thought of prayer when heart and brain seemed like bursting, when her very reason seemed tottering; she had thought only of Walter Holm, and of the disgrace she had brought upon him, of the utter desolation of her own lot.

But she dared not die without appealing to her Maker to forgive her sin. She dared not throw away the life He had given her without asking Him to be merciful.

But her confused and burning thoughts refused to shape themselves at her bidding; she could not frame one sentence of entreaty. But into her tortured mind, as if whispered to her by her good angel, came the words of an old school prayer, learned years and years ago.

It was a simple, commonplace prayer, and there were no tender memories connected with it. It had not been learned at a loving mother's knee, but had been taught her in common with a score of school-fellows, repeated morning and evening as a lesson is taught and recited. But she muttered it now, half-unconsciously, and the white, drawn lips quivered and her chest heaved convulsively with sobs that would not be stifled, as memories came back to her of her innocent girlhood, compared with her position now—a desolate wanderer on the face of the earth, a wife of two husbands; scarce eighteen, and an intending suicide!

Ah! The tears came now to the blazing eyes, and she cried like a child. For a long time she sobbed and wept there on that lonely bridge, while belated travelers flitted by, and one stern guardian of the night passed and repassed with watchful eyes ever upon her.

Those tears eased brain and heart.

Weak and worn, and despairing she still had strength to utter a new prayer—a prayer from her very soul that God would pity and guard her; and as she looked into the dark waters she shuddered and drew back, for its fatal fascination was broken. Not for her a suicide's death—she could destroy her life, but she would not, and with it all hope of eternal rest.

"Oh, I must have been mad!" she thought. "It is terrible to live, but how much more terrible to die!—for death is not all. If I could end all in one act—if by flinging myself into the river I would know no more forever, then I would do it; but death is not the end—it is only the beginning."

She gave up all idea of suicide now, and crouched there with a sense of thanksgiving that she had not committed that crime for which there is no repentance. But she was forced soon to change her position, for the policeman who had passed a dozen or more times once more appeared.

"Come, you clear out of this!" he said roughly, touching Winifred with his club, as though she had been a beast in a cage—"out of this,

now! The station-house is the place for the likes of you!"

Winifred arose as he flashed the full light of his lantern upon her; and then he cast a glance that she was not of the same class as the women who were usually found at such a place at such a time. The lady-like attire, the pure, high-bred face, the gentle, half-haughty manner, with its charming reserve, all made him grow involuntarily respectful—all declared to him that this homeless one was a lady.

"Please let me go," Winifred said quietly.

He made no attempt to detain her, and she went swiftly back, turning to the street, and in a moment had placed herself beyond his sight.

"Well, let her go," he muttered to himself. "She's sure to make for home now; and I hope she'll get there safe."

Winifred found herself in a quarter of New York of which she knew little. Her wanderings so far had been without aim, almost without thought, except to reach the river; but now she hurried on her backward way, because it seemed to her she must be in rapid motion, and she walked until at last she only stopped because too tired to walk further.

Her brain was no longer dazed or confused. She thoroughly understood her situation. She knew that morning would soon come and that she must find shelter.

She could not go back to Walter Holm, she could not meet him, nor Mrs. James, nor the boarders.

"I will write and tell him, she thought drearily, "but I cannot meet him ever again. I love him better than my life and Hubert Lansdowne is living. Oh God in heaven help me to do what is right."

She felt she could not cling to Holm without guilt. She felt she must never see him again, that she must spare them both the unavailing anguish of a meeting.

"There is a barrier now between us, that separates us forever," she thought despairingly; "I could not bear to meet his gaze or witness his grief. I dropped out of his life never to be taken into it again. Where then, shall I go?"

By this time, it was almost daylight and she found herself near a down-town ferry. A few people were hurrying into the ferry-house and she followed them, entered the waiting room, and took a retired seat.

The question where she should go was no nearer solution than before. She had eaten nothing in almost twenty four hours, and now began to experience physical weakness in consequence, and with a sudden longing, thought of a steaming cup of coffee.

Putting her hand in her pocket she found her purse and she looked at her money finding it all intact. She procured herself breakfast, in the restaurant attached to the ferry-house.

Her breakfast eaten she returned to the waiting room, where upon a seat beside her, lay a copy of yesterday's paper, which she mechanically opened, and then less mechanically sought for the column in which boarding-houses are advertised, and among the list was the address of one of which she had heard before, to which she had been recommended some months previously before seeking the home to which she had gone



upon her return from Leighlands. "Why I not go there now?" she asked herself; a long distance from the heart of New York city, and I shall be hidden both from Lansdowne and Walter, until I can decide upon my future course."

With the address in mind, she called a carriage, and was borne away to her new destination.

It was a long, long drive, and a general wakefulness was apparent throughout all the streets of the city long before her destination was reached. The street and number were discovered without any trouble, and arrived at the door Winifred alighted, paid the driver, and dismissed the carriage; rung the door-bell and inquired of the servant for the address in the paper.

The landlady was unmistakably an Irish-woman, with unmistakable Irish features, with a bright pleasing expression, with manners quite those of a lady, and evidently possessing a genial, joyous temperament.

"I am Mrs. Hunter," she said smilingly as she bowed. "The servant was telling me you wished to see me."

"Yes," Winifred said, "I am Miss Leigh. I have read your advertisement in the '*Tribune*' and have come to look for board. Can you accommodate me?"

Mrs. Hunter saw at once that her visitor was a lady.

"I have a vacant room," she said; "sit down, Miss Leigh. You're looking pale and tired. Did you bring references?"

"No," answered Winifred. "I have no friends. If I pay you in advance, will that not do instead of references?"

She spoke pleadingly, and her pale face flushed painfully.

"It is not the money altogether that makes me ask for references," Mrs. Hunter said, "but it's not usual for a young lady like you to come alone seeking board, although I am not saying anything at all against the proceeding. All the same, single ladies like yourself cannot be too careful. Are you a lady of fortune, Miss Leigh?"

"No," said Winifred, "I have my own living to earn. I have only about a hundred dollars in the world and that is now in my pocket."

Mrs. Hunter looked at her in surprise, then with a little smile:

"How do you ever expect to get through the world telling your secrets like that? If you were in some places you might be taken advantage of until your money was gone. It isn't fit for a slip of a girl to be out alone in New York, and I don't know but it's my duty to take you in and protect you. I believe I will. I have taken a fancy to you, Miss Leigh. Suppose you come up and look at the room and see how it will suit you?"

She conducted Winifred up two flights of stairs to a bright little front room, so cosy and comfortable it looked quite unlike a room in a boarding-house.

"Oh! may I stay now?" Winifred asked wistfully. "I don't know where in the world I shall go if you send me away."

Mrs. Hunter led the way down to the dining-room, where she made some further inquiries

of her, and which Winifred answered frankly, since none of the questions bore in any way upon the secrets of her life.

The warm-hearted woman conceived a great interest for her, and ended in permitting her to take the room and possession of it at once.

Winifred was at once installed in her room, where, after refreshment and basking in the warmth of the grateful fire, she fell asleep and slept profoundly for hours. She was so utterly worn and exhausted that she did not dream—brain and muscles alike were held in a death-like repose.

It was late in the afternoon when she awakened, and her toilet was scarcely re-made when Mrs. Hunter knocked, and on being bidden, entered her room.

"Your baggage has not yet arrived, Miss Leigh," she said, after some preliminary remarks. "Did you order it sent here?"

"I have no baggage; I have lost all I had," said Winifred. "At least, I left it all behind me."

"Then send for it at once," Mrs. Hunter said; "you'll need some toilet articles without delay, and as I am going out presently I will buy for you whatever you want."

Winifred accepted the kind offer, gave Mrs. Hunter some money for the proposed purchases, and among other things desired her to procure a supply of stationery.

Late that afternoon Winifred sat alone in her cheery little room and wrote this letter:

"MR. WALTER HOLM:—When I left Charles street last night in great haste it was with a determination to take my own life, but God in His mercy caused my plan to fail. I have found a shelter now, but where it is I may not tell you, for we can never meet again. I am not your wife, Walter—how can I tell you that I am not? As we stood together at the door of the clergyman's house, that to me was like the threshold of Paradise, I saw *him* passing by—*him*, Hubert Lansdowne, my husband! God pity us both! I shall never see you again, but I shall pray until I die that in time a happier love may banish all remembrance of me from your mind. Life is very hard. Good-by forever. WINIFRED."

The next morning, closely veiled, and determined to leave no clew by which she could be traced, she took the elevated road to the general post-office and mailed her letter, and then returned to her boarding-house, feeling that life was to be begun all anew, feeling also that her hope and courage were all spent.

"Surely I have now drained my cup of bitterness to the dregs. I must go to work again. Now must come the hand-to-hand struggle with poverty and hard work at the very time when I have lost my strength to keep up with them. There is but one ray of comfort—I know the worst. Since I have nothing more to hope, I have nothing more to fear."

It was well for her she could not read the future.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AN EVENTFUL MEETING.

WINIFRED lost no time in seeking something to do. She knew that in work alone she would find her best solace, that only through physical exhaustion



could she hope for sleep at night, only through toil escape the haunting memories that made her life a torment. She had less than a hundred dollars in her pocketbook, but that must be a provision against a rainy day for which all should provide. Were that sum spent and should sickness and destitution come, she would inevitably be forced to find refuge in a public hospital, and if she died her grave would be in the Potter's Field.

Accordingly, upon the morning following her establishment at Mrs. Hunter's, she sought that lady's advice as to her future, and, counseled by her, wrote a modest little advertisement and procured its insertion in the leading New York morning papers.

Pending its appearance she procured materials and set to work at embroidery. The advertisement brought in no application for her services, but for five days early and late Winifred applied herself to her work, and when the elegant table scarf was finished she folded it carefully in linen and tissue and set out to dispose of it.

She was dressed in black from head to foot—dress, sacque, hat, veil and gloves. So costumed she was not likely to attract as much attention as she otherwise might have done, while it also served as a disguise should any one who knew her be looking for her, while it seemed to her that although Hubert Lansdowne was still living, yet she was a widow indeed, and her mourning garb for the man she had loved and lost seemed altogether appropriate and proper.

After inquiring at several places as to the sale of her workmanship, she was told that embroidery of that kind was a drug in the market. Place after place she visited with the same result, and at last quite disheartened, paused before the plate-glass window of a store in Twenty-fourth street devoted to the sale of ladies' fancy-work and the materials therefor. Winifred decided that possibly here she might find better luck.

There was a carriage standing before the door with coachman and footman in livery, but Winifred did not notice it.

She opened the door and passed in a few paces, and sat down a little way from a lady who was sitting at the counter attended by two obsequious clerks.

The lady was of a rather large frame, of positive brunette type of beauty, handsome, yet in a measure, bold and unlovely. She was elegantly attired in myrtle-green velvet, trimmed with silver fur. Her hands were ungloved and sparkled with diamonds. She wore her hat far on the back of her head, its myrtle-green plumes nodding over the dark bangs on her forehead. Her eyebrows were visibly penciled by the hand of art, and the flush on her cheek was due altogether to "Laird's Bloom of Youth."

She was Cornelia Mordaunt—the lady who had been with Hubert Lansdowne at the time he had recognized his deserted young bride—the lady to whom he had dared engage himself in marriage, simply and solely for her money.

And so met these two, one the wife of Hubert Stuart Lansdowne, poor, forsaken, wronged, seeking to earn her own bread, the other the betrothed wife of Lansdowne, wealthy, disdainful and supercilious. A greater contrast than that afforded by these two women, the whole world could not furnish.

No subtle instinct warned them of the singular relationship between them. Miss Mordaunt was looking at the embroideries and was loud in her expressions of dissatisfaction of what had been offered her.

One of the shop-girls asked Winifred what she desired.

"I have some embroidery of my own work to sell," Winifred answered in a low, cultured voice; "will you look at it?"

Before the girl could answer Winifred displayed

her work. She examined it critically and admiringly as she asked Winifred the price, and then shook her head.

"Let me see it," said Miss Mordaunt imperiously; "bring it to me, girl."

Not resenting the domineering tone, Winifred came forward quietly, and with perfect good breeding displayed the scarf.

"It suits me," announced Miss Mordaunt after a close examination; "I will take it. How much is it?"

Winifred threw back her veil, and then Miss Mordaunt, looking up from the work for the first time, obtained a view of Winifred's face. It was very pale and thin and wan, with a mournful look in the blue eyes, and a pitiful smile on the sweet mouth, but it reminded her, nevertheless, of the proud lovely face she had seen on the sidewalk entering the carriage in front of the clergyman's residence, the sight of which had so visibly affected her lover, and of which she had thought so much since. Could it be the same girl? She reflected a moment.

That Hubert Lansdowne knew this girl she felt assured, and that the girl's illness at the sight of Lansdowne that morning had something to do with him, she also had been convinced then. She resolved then and there to probe this mystery to the bottom.

"I think this scarf worth more than you ask," she said, smilingly. "I will give you twenty-five dollars for it, and consider it cheap at that."

Twenty-five dollars! Winifred doubted that she heard aright, the more especially as Miss Mordaunt's mouth, despite the smile, had an expression of unpleasant cruelty about it. She took the money with a vague wonder that any one should pay her more than she asked.

"I want a set for the library—valance and portiere," Miss Mordaunt went on; "they must be very elegant. Could you not design something to suit me?"

"How would you like a ground of dark claret plush, with lilies appliqued on? The stamens of the lily should be in gold thread and the petals in warm tints of green. For a border blue harebells and carnations. I dare say I could improve upon this hasty suggestion, but I think I could please you."

"I think you could, excellently well," Miss Mordaunt returned. "Draw the designs at once, and when done bring them to me at my uncle's, Judge Mordaunt—Lexington avenue."

Winifred bowed at this tacit dismissal, passed out at the door and halted a moment on the sidewalk.

"I will take a street car home," she thought. "I am very tired. How generous the lady was! I feel I can earn my living now, and lay up money against sickness and old age."

She moved out to the curb, waiting for the proper car to convey her home. Her veil was still thrown back that her sight might not be impeded, and as she thus stood, looking into the street, Hubert Lansdowne, coming up Sixth avenue to rejoin Cornelia, saw her, recognizing her in an instant, despite her black garments.

"Winifred, as I live!" he exclaimed. "And there is the Mordaunt carriage! Cornelia cannot be far off. What a frightful risk! She might actually see Winifred!"

Winifred signaled the horse-car and as she stepped toward it, Lansdowne signaled a passing coupe, ordered the driver to keep the horse-car in sight, and to follow the lady in mourning when she should alight. Winifred entered the car, and Lansdowne in the coupe followed after her.

"I must see her," he muttered, uneasily; "evidently she has run away from her bridegroom. She must have informed herself about me before this time. She knows who I am. She may even go to Judge Mordaunt and expose me. I must have an interview and learn upon what terms she will keep silence."



## CHAPTER XII.

## FACE TO FACE.

ALL unconscious of pursuit, Winifred alighted from the street-car, in the neighborhood of her boarding-house, and continued her journey on foot. At a convenient corner Hubert Lansdowne alighted from the carriage also, dismissed it and walked on slowly, keeping the girl's slender, graceful figure in view.

Winifred did not look around as she rung the door-bell, and from across the street Lansdowne saw his deserted young bride enter the house with the manner of a resident and close the door behind her.

"I've tracked her!" he thought, exultantly. "Under what name is she known here? For whom shall I inquire? Mrs. Lansdowne? Miss Leigh? Miss—what?"

He walked up and down the street slowly, uncertain whether, after all, Winifred might not come out; but as she did not, he at last boldly rung the bell.

The servant appeared in response to his summons.

"I have called to see a cousin of mine, who, I understand, is stopping here. She was a Miss Leigh—"

"Oh, it's Miss Leigh you're wanting to see, is it?" interrupted the servant as she caught the name. "If she's your cousin, of course you can see her. She's at home; come in, sir."

She would have ushered him into the parlor, but he drew back.

"Don't let me trouble you, my good girl," he said politely, as he removed his hat; "I will just run up to my cousin's room, if you please. Tell me which one it is, and I will find it by myself, and give my cousin a pleasant surprise."

The servant hesitated a moment. It did not seem quite the thing that the young gentleman should go up to Winifred's room; but then he was a cousin, and a cousin is surely a very near relative, especially when it is a very handsome young gentleman. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hunter was not at home, and equally unfortunately, the servant's doubts were suddenly set at rest by Lansdowne slipping a bill into her hand.

"Thank you kindly, sir. It's the third floor, front."

Lansdowne went up-stairs. At Winifred's door he paused a moment, and then turned the knob and entered, and as he entered, locked the door softly after him.

As the bolt shot home with a gentle click, Winifred lifted her face from her work, turned her head, and saw him.

For one moment she looked as if transfixed; then she sprung to her feet, her face whitening, her eyes dilating, and a look of terror stiffening her features.

"Hubert!" she whispered.

"Yes," he said, trying to speak lightly; "you don't seem at all glad to see me. Is this your welcome to your husband?"

She made a gesture of utter loathing.

"Don't call yourself my husband! I cannot bear it! How did you find me? What do you want?"

"I saw you in the street and followed you home. Did you think me dead, Winifred? Is this mourning attire for me?" he said, with hypocritical solemnity.

"For you!" she said, her voice quivering with bitterest scorn. "For you! Why should I wear mourning for you? A man whose name I do not even know!"

Lansdowne's heart gave a quick, exultant throb.

What! she did not even know whether or not Lansdowne were his name. She really and truly knew nothing about him, save what he had seen fit to tell her! Why, he need not have come to her at all, had he only known. He need not have feared in the least, since she was not dangerous.

As he stood there, his wily, scheming brain comprehended the whole situation, and he mapped out a course on the instant which he believed would secure Cornelia Mordaunt and her riches to him even yet.

"Is this my welcome back to life?" he asked reproachfully. "Instead of receiving me with open arms as I expected, you treat me as your enemy."

"What are you but my enemy?"

"What have I done to offend you, Winifred? Why has your love for me turned to hatred?"

"You ask me that," she demanded, "after that scene when you flung me from you in your fury at the discovery of my obscure birth and my poverty; after your desertion of me; after your pretended death in a gambling saloon in San Francisco; after all this, you ask me why I do not receive you with open arms? I never knew before how poor and pitiful a man could be."

Her slender figure was drawn up, her splendid blue eyes were full of dazzling fire, and a thrill of admiration went through Lansdowne's heart at the sight of her, and his old love for her was quickened into sudden ardor.

"There is some mistake here, Winifred," he said quietly; "I have been base and cruel, but if ever a man repented of his faults I have repented of mine. Listen to me, Winifred; let me speak in my own defense."

"Speak, then!"

Lansdowne came nearer her and sat down upon the sofa. She remained standing, cold, pale, incredulous, while he told her his story, romantic, and intended to be soul-stirring to the last extreme, and at times wiping the perspiration from his brows as if the recollection of those bygone days were harrowing to his very soul.

"Not two weeks ago I made my way back to New York," he concluded, "and found that I was believed to be dead. The newspapers had narrated the accident and chronicled my supposed death. I hastened to Jersey City, but found the house tenanted by a strange family. I could find no trace of you. Then I came to New York, and by merest accident came upon you. At last we are reunited, never more to be separated. Winifred, forgive me for my faults and follies, will you not? I have risen from a sick bed a better man, and henceforth I will be all that you can desire."

He arose and approached her with open arms.

"Back!" she said, retreating before him. "You have told me your story and it may all be true. God forgive me for doubting it if it is. You married me under an assumed name, and our marriage was not legal."

"Yes, it was. You believed it to be my name, and the fact that no fraud was intended, renders the marriage legal. Any lawyer will tell you that. I acknowledge you as my true and lawful wife. I love you. And I beg you to forgive me."

Again he essayed to approach her.

"Back!" she said again with a gesture of command. "Now I have something to say to you. Our past is dead; I can never be to you what I once thought to be. I never loved you, never. It was but a girlish fancy I felt for you, and that fancy which you might easily have quickened into love, died long ago."

"But I will win your love. In any case, you are my wife, you know."

Her lip curled.

"Your wife! Do you think I can step back into my old position? That I can ever respect or love you again?"

"You must, you shall."

"There is that between us that can never be bridged over. Since I last saw you I have found what true nobility in man really is. I have loved, I have married. When you and I met the other day, I was just from my second bridal, and he upon whose arm I leaned was the man I had just married."



Lansdowne appeared to reel under the blow.

"I knew you on the instant," she went on. "A deadly terror was at my heart. I fainted and was taken home where I was ill for hours. At evening I went out to destroy my life, but God saved me and brought me to this refuge."

"Married, married!" and he repeated the words as if refusing to believe them. "What is the name of this second husband of yours?"

"His name cannot matter to you. You never knew him," said Winifred. "I do not think I could bear to hear his name upon your lips."

Lansdowne bowed his head as unconsolable in sorrow.

"Married again! Is it possible! My wife married again! You did not intentionally commit a crime, Winifred, and I can forgive that easier than I can your speedy forgetfulness of me. We have both erred—you have committed bigamy and I have been harsh and wayward. Your fault brings us nearer together. You must come back to me, Winifred, for notwithstanding all that has come between us, you are my true and lawful wife."

Winifred shrunk back from the glitter of his eyes and the flaming passion on his handsome face.

"Come back to you? Never! Would you chain a woman to you who hates you?"

A stormy look came into his eyes.

"Yes I would, if that woman were yourself."

"No," she said impetuously, "we are done with each other forever. Go your way, Hubert, and leave me in peace. The only happiness I can ask now, is to be free from your presence forever."

"Winifred, you know not what you are saying. I am your husband and I love you—"

"I would rather you hated me. Understand me, Hubert, I would die before I would go back to you," she cried, her mutinous face indescribably beautiful, the sight of it stirring up all his passion for her in one wild bitterness. "I never loved you, although I thought I did. As I was your wife in name for but a brief hour, so shall I henceforth be only so in name. I do not respect you, I do not love you; believing you dead I learned to love another; I love him now with all my heart and soul, and shall love him until I die, but I shall never see him again. I shall never see you again either. I shall live out my life alone, equally apart from the man I love and the man I hate. Never speak to me again of love, Hubert Lansdowne. Now, will you go?"

She pointed to the door.

Lansdowne's heart seemed on fire with his quickened love for her, and as he looked upon her he loathed the very thought of Cornelia Mordaunt. Why, he asked himself, should he not possess them both?—actually asked himself the question in the depths of his guilty soul with Winifred's pure proud face shining down upon him.

Marrying Cornelia would bring him Judge Mordaunt's favor, and secure to him Judge Mordaunt's riches through his niece, his sole heiress; but this girl, so gentle yet so fiery, so tender yet so passionate, was the one whom he loved. The one would minister to his pride, to his necessities, the other, to his affections.

He pleaded with Winifred with all the eloquence of which he was capable. He urged his repentance, his despair, his desolation. He implored her to have pity, to be his good angel, to save him from himself.

He employed all the old arts of fascination which he had hitherto deemed irresistible, but to all, Winifred was as cold as marble.

He could have gnashed his teeth at her cool rejection of his professed repentance, and his eager advances. He realized that all his boasted fascinations were powerless with her.

He determined he would not give her up, that he would make some compromise with her to gain time, to cover himself from detection and subsequent ruin, and that he would devote every effort to the task of winning her back to him.

"Winifred," he said, in a tone and manner that was in extreme contrast with his previous eagerness, "I will not use the authority which I might use, to compel you to return to me. I will leave you your freedom until you return to me voluntarily, on one condition—that you will agree never to mention our marriage to a living soul, that you will not call yourself by my name, and that you will never lay any claim to your position as my wife."

"I agree to it all, willingly, I will never lay any claim to you, you may rest assured."

"I know I can trust every word you say. I love you still, Winifred, better than I ever loved you before. If you will not come back to me while I am waiting for you, I would still give much to shield you from the world. How do you support yourself?"

She pointed to the piles of floss and plush lying on the chair beside the rocker at the window.

"With your needle? This must not be; I have a little money and you must share it with me. You are my wife and certainly cannot decline to allow me to support you."

"But I do decline to allow you to support me. I will never take a penny of your money."

"Very well, have your own way—perhaps some time you may think more kindly of me, and may be willing to accept a home at my hands even if I may not share it with you."

He sighed heavily as he spoke. Then rose and stepped nearer to her. She retreated from him.

"You will not even shake hands with me?" he said bitterly. "Yet I have more to pardon than you have. Well, then, Winifred, good-by. But remember, you might have made me what you would. Remember, the wife who is so recreant to her trust is far more to be blamed than the husband who errs. Remember that, Winifred."

He opened the door and departed. Winifred listened to the tread of his steps on the stair, and to the closing of the outer door behind him, and from her window she saw him pass down the street.

"Have I done right?" she asked herself. "Is it the duty of a wife to overlook all these things that have come between us and to cling to her husband still? If he neglected his duty should I neglect mine? I promised to love honor and obey till death did us part, and, believing him dead, considered myself absolved from that vow. But he is not dead, then am I absolved? He may come back to me again; if he does—" and her face grew still paler and a look of dire anguish came into her blue eyes, "if he does, must I go back to him? God show me my duty!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AT JUDGE MORDAUNT'S.

ACCORDING to agreement, Winifred took her specimens of work to Miss Mordaunt and was shown up to that lady's boudoir.

Miss Mordaunt was alone. She wore a dressing-gown of pink cashmere trimmed with a profusion of terra-cotta ribbons. Her hair was arranged in the latest fashionable style, and her hard black eyes grew bright at the sight of Winifred as she greeted her with a gracious smile.

"I rather expected you to-day," she said, condescendingly; "pray be seated Miss—Miss—"

"Miss Leigh," Winifred said simply. "I have finished the designs for your library draperies, madam, and have brought them for your inspection. Permit me to show you my work."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, as Winifred unrolled her parcel displaying the exquisite designs. "You have actual genius. How beautiful those figures are shaded. Sit down, Miss Leigh," Miss Mordaunt continued.

Winifred sat down at a corner of the hearth in a low French chair, while Miss Mordaunt renewed



her admiration of her designs expressing herself in warm terms.

"You'll make your fortune," she said. "I think I shall want another set for this room when these are done, and I shall certainly recommend you to my friends. You ought to adopt a French name, Miss Leigh, then you would get double the price for your work, for you know what the world is. But the dare say you could not speak French."

"Madam," Winifred returned, "I was educated in America and speak no foreign language."

"You must have been young then when you left school, for now, in our common public schools they teach French and German. Are your parents living, Miss Leigh?"

"I am alone in the world, madam," Winifred replied, with a quiet dignity that impressed Miss Mordaunt in spite of herself.

"But I should not think you would be obliged to work a great while to support yourself—that beautiful face of yours certainly should secure you a rich husband, Miss Leigh."

Winifred flushed and drew herself haughtily up.

"I beg your pardon if my freedom has offended you," said Miss Mordaunt. "Although awkward, I am sincere in paying you such a compliment. Surely with such beauty as yours, you have a lover. Is not that so?"

She affected a lightness of manner, but in truth was very anxious for Winifred's reply, but it was no easy matter to intrude into the girl's confidence. With unmistakable haughtiness Winifred replied:

"Excuse me, madam, I cannot discuss my private affairs with any one."

Miss Mordaunt reddened with anger, but managed to conceal her chagrin.

"You are right, and I will respect your reticence. I was interested in you, and fancied I could read a romance in your black dress. I should have been pleased to have been of service to you, but as you intimate, we will confine ourselves to business."

As she spoke she counted out the money for the designs submitted.

"I should like a friend's opinion upon them before you take them away to carry them out," she said smoothly. "He has an artist's tastes, and I am positive will admire your work. He is at this moment calling, I will summon him."

Her heart was throbbing fast with exultation as she stepped to the door, and in low soft tones called to some one in a room evidently not far off.

"Stuart!" she said maliciously, "come into my boudoir a minute, will you? That is if uncle can spare you a moment; I have something to show you."

"All right," replied Lansdowne, "I will be there in a moment."

Miss Mordaunt returned to Winifred.

"My lover is coming," she said. "I do hope he will admire your work, but of course he will like them if I do. Stuart is such a dear good fellow, so perfectly devoted to me, thinks me an absolute angel and so on, but that is a weakness of lovers, I suppose."

Winifred made no reply, while Miss Mordaunt listened impatiently for Lansdowne's step. She was eager to solve the mystery of the relation between this beautiful girl and Hubert Stuart Lansdowne. That they had known each other she was sufficiently sure. That it was the sight of Lansdowne that had stricken down Winifred at the door of the carriage she was convinced. She believed that the two had known each other, that Lansdowne had made love to Miss Leigh and had won her love. She believed that Lansdowne might even have betrayed Winifred into a mock marriage, but not one thought of the actual truth penetrated her mind. How could she suspect that the betrothed lover of Judge Robert Mordaunt's heiress was actually and legally married to Winifred Leigh, and that she, Cornelia Mordaunt, could never be his wife while this fair-faced girl lived.

Had she suspected this truth she never would have schemed to bring Winifred face to face with Lansdowne, although her suspicions were becoming so nearly certainty, that the desire to verify them had become a most feverish one.

A careless step crossed the hall; and then the door opened, and humming an air from Tolanthe, Hubert Lansdowne came sauntering into the room.

In the first moment of his entrance he did not see the slender figure in black at the corner of the hearth. His eyes rested upon Cornelia, who stood evilly exultant near the door.

"Well, what is it you wish, *ma chere*?" he asked pleasantly; "something lovely to show me did you say?"

"I have been making arrangements for some embroideries for the library. Just look at these, will you? Please unfold the parcel, Miss Leigh—"

Winifred rose up, white as death. Lansdowne turned his gaze upon her, and fairly glared at her. For a second, they confronted each other in dead silence, while his face momentarily grew more livid and Cornelia Mordaunt's low laugh rung softly through the room as Lansdowne stood like an animal suddenly brought to bay.

Then Winifred dropped back into her chair. Lansdowne muttered a savage oath, so terrible that even Cornelia shrunk back from him, and strode forward toward his wronged young bride, blazing wrath and uncontrollable fury on his face.

"You here!" he said; "you have tracked me then, have you? You have broken your promise, have you? You have told your lying story to this lady—"

"Stop!" Winifred cried sternly, her sweet face not less stern than her voice. "Are you this lady's lover, Hubert Lansdowne?"

"You know it. Have you not told her?"

As he spoke he looked from Cornelia to Winifred and back again. "This lady," indicating Cornelia, "is the lady to whom I am engaged to be married. How dare you come here, how dare you track me—"

"I have not tracked you. I came to bring some work which this lady engaged me to do. I did not know you knew her; the discovery is entirely accidental. And this lady is to be your wife also!"

She looked at Cornelia, pityingly, who flashed back upon her a look of hatred.

"She is to be my wife," Lansdowne said struggling to maintain a calm front, yet stung to desperation. "Cornelia, what has this girl been telling you?"

"Nothing. I suspected you had known each other and in order to verify my suspicions I contrived to bring you together. Who is this girl, Stuart?"

"A girl I met on a Coney Island boat," he answered. "I had a passing fancy for her, and we went through the form of a marriage, but I took good care that it should lack validity. That is the story—not so much of it, after all, is there?"

"Ah, indeed!" said Cornelia; "does this side of the story differ from yours Miss Leigh?"

"Is his name really Lansdowne, Hubert Stuart Lansdowne?" Winifred asked gravely.

"Yes, that is his name."

"He pretended that the name was assumed, but Hubert Lansdowne was the name he was married under. We were married by an authorized clergyman in the city, and our marriage is duly recorded."

Cornelia caught her breath sharply while Lansdowne met her gaze with one of sullen fury and defiance.

"You invited this girl here," he said ironically, "and I wish you joy of her and her trumped-up stories. I did marry her, but the marriage is not legal. Her name is not Winifred Leigh, nor yet Winifred Lansdowne. Heaven only knows what it is."

Winifred quivered as if under a blow.

"I have not come here to expose you and I have nothing more to say," she answered quietly. "I am poor and friendless, but I would die sooner than take my position as your wife. I have no friends to



be wounded by my misfortunes, and I am content to leave my case in the hands of Him who knows all. But I can never sink so low as to lay any claim to you, Hubert Lansdowne. You and this lady need have no fear of me."

Her lip curled in a scorn she could not conceal. She rose and took up her scattered drawings, the most cool and self-possessed of the three.

She looked so pure, so fair, so dainty, that Lansdowne involuntarily contrasted her with the woman for whose sake he had permitted himself to contemplate so terrible a crime. He realized it was Winifred whom he loved with all his small soul, and it was with difficulty that he repressed a sigh of regret.

"I am sure I do not fear you," Cornelia said calmly. "I will see you again on this matter, Miss Leigh."

Lansdowne sprung for and held the door as Winifred gathered her designs together, and as she moved toward the stairs he went back into Cornelia's room heavy-hearted and sore-troubled. She met him with a countenance of ire.

"Is this girl's story true?" she demanded. "You have no timid, ignorant school-girl to deal with now whom a word can deceive. I demand the truth from your lips, if you can speak the truth, but not now. To-night I will see you again on the subject, and if I conclude her story is correct—and somehow that girl's face impresses me with her truthfulness and honor—if I conclude to believe her and doubt you—"

Meanwhile Winifred had descended the stairs. As she came to the lower hall the door of the library opened and Judge Mordaunt came out, meeting her face to face as she drew back politely to give him precedence.

He stood still as in a species of fascination. Something in the pale, lovely face touched his very heart. He noted that she had a small, noble head crowned with vivid golden hair, and that her blue eyes wore a sweet unconscious beseeching. He saw that her beauty was of a striking and glorious order, and that she had the manners of a thorough lady. Supposing her to be a morning visitor of his niece, he raised his hat to her, almost unconsciously, and halted with a respectful gesture for her to pass on. She bowed in acknowledgment of his courtesy and walked on. As she neared the vestibule she adjusted her glove, and in so doing accidentally detached the clasp of the bracelet she always wore and it fell to the floor, but before Judge Mordaunt, who saw it fall, could speak, Winifred had passed out of the door and was gone.

He hurried forward and caught up the bracelet, a single sight of which was sufficient to blanch his face into the most profound agitation. He grasped it tightly in his hand and rushed out into the street.

Winifred was not in sight.

"Too late!" he muttered. "I would have given all the world to have spoken to her. Who is she? What is she doing here? How came that bracelet in her possession?"

He put the ornament in his pocket and went back into the house. He hurried up-stairs into Miss Mordaunt's boudoir. Her voice bade him enter, and she herself met him just within the door.

"Excuse my abruptness, my dear," he said. "I have not come for a visit, but to inquire the name of the young lady who passed out just now. What was her name, Cornelia?"

"Leigh, uncle Robert, Miss Winifred Leigh."

"Leigh! Leigh! Can it be possible? Leigh! Remember, if she comes again, that I must see her. Leigh, Leigh," he repeated to himself as he slowly descended to the street. "And the bracelet, the very bracelet! What are these thoughts that come to me? Can it be—could it be? I will find that girl, of whose existence I never dreamed—if I dare dream of it now—I will never rest until I find her and know the truth!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A POINTING FINGER.

ON leaving the residence of Judge Mordaunt, Winifred returned to her boarding-house, and did not leave her room again that day.

The meeting with Hubert Lansdowne, and the discovery that he contemplated marrying, when she was his wife, had completely unnerved her. She could not work, she could scarcely eat or sleep, it seemed to her that she could only feel and think.

What she suffered during that day and night need not be depicted; but the next day, a little more wan and sorrowful, a little thinner and paler, she was at work again.

Three or four days of unremitting toil, and then, her work completed, which she had begun for Miss Mordaunt, it became necessary to dispose of it. Much as she shrunk from going from shop to shop, as she had done before, there was no help for it, and so Winifred put on her black garments and her crape veil, which so effectually enshrouded her, and once more set forth upon her mission.

"It is hard work," she thought wearily, when she had gone almost the entire length of several streets, and all to no purpose. "There seems to be no place in the whole world for me! If I cannot sell this, I must try to get plain sewing; if that cannot be obtained, then I must go back to the store again."

She came out of Sixth avenue considerably disheartened, and as she turned the corner of Twenty-third street brushed against her old friend, Mrs. James.

In spite of her mourning attire, Mrs. James knew her instantly. She stood a moment as if dazed, then, as Winifred essayed to pass on, she caught at her sacque, exclaiming eagerly:

"Oh, Mrs. Holm, where have you been all this time? And your poor, poor dear husband just wild about you! Oh, my dear, my dear!"

Fearful lest curious eyes should note them, lest a scene should be created, Winifred paused beside her.

"How do you do, Mrs. James?" she said quietly. "If you wish to speak to me come down Twenty-third street."

Mrs. James kept a close hold upon her, and went in the direction indicated.

"I knew you at once," Mrs. James began, "in spite of your dress and veil. I knew you by the way you carried your head, by your walk, by your whole self. Oh, Miss Leigh—I mean Mrs. Holm—wherever have you been?"

"I have been quite safe, Mrs. James, and quite well in health. How is—Mr. Holm?"

Her voice faltered as she made the inquiry.

"He is not well, how could he be? It would hardly be an exaggeration to say he neither eats nor sleeps," she said reproachfully. "He spends all his time in searching for you. He has grown thin and nervous. Oh, Mrs. Holm, you treated him cruelly."

Winifred drew her veil aside.

"Have I not suffered too?" she asked. "Look at me, Mrs. James, is my face a happy one?"

Ah! It was not a happy face, but so pitiful and sorrowful that the tears sprung into Mrs. James's eyes.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, yes, you have suffered! Child! what is all this trouble for? Why did you run away from your bridegroom on your wedding-day?"

"I cannot tell you what impelled me to go, Mrs. James, but I discovered that I had made a frightful mistake, that I was not free to marry Mr. Holm as I thought I was, and I knew of no way of rectifying the mistake but to go away. I am sorry for Mr. Holm but I can never see him again."

"Not his wife! You will never see him again!"

"Never," said Winifred firmly. "He is free; in time he may marry some one whom he may love. Every hour I pray to God to pardon me for the blight I have brought upon his life, and to make him forget me and to be happy without me."

"My dear," said Mrs. James convincingly, "this



is the worst nonsense I ever heard. You have got some ridiculous ideas in your head, but Mr. Holm will reason it out of you in no time. You have treated him cruelly in running off from him as you did, but if you think your marriage to him is wrong why not reason the matter over with him? Don't set up your opinion against the rest of the world, but be advised, Mrs. Holm."

"I could not bear the pain of seeing Mr. Holm, and I know I am right, Mrs. James. I shall not go back to him. You don't know, Mrs. James, you never can know—"

"I know one thing, however," she said as Winifred paused, "and that is that I am going to take you back to your husband even though I have to call a policeman to bring a carriage to take you there. You are not in your right mind, Mrs. Holm, and I consider with my old-fashioned notion of things, that a woman's husband is her best protector."

She grasped Winifred still more closely, and peered up and down the street for a carriage, and then suddenly came to an abrupt halt uttering an exclamation of absolute astonishment.

"What is the matter?" Winifred asked.

"Look, look yonder!" cried Mrs. James. "Do you see that large handsome man yonder with the gray hair and full beard? Look quick, do you see him?"

"Yes," Winifred said. "I see him. Well, what?"

"What a fate that I should have seen him to-day, and for the first time in seventeen years!" exclaimed Mrs. James, excitedly, and in her excitement relaxing her hold on Winifred's dress. "I wonder where he came from? I can hardly believe the evidence of my own eyes; but I'd know him for all he's turned gray, I'd know him anywhere in the world! Mrs. Holm, that is Mr. Roberts, your father!"

Winifred looked after the luxurious carriage as if spell-bound.

The gentleman to whom Mrs. James had pointed out to her as Mr. Roberts, and her own father, was Judge Mordaunt!

Winifred recognized him at once as the gentleman she had seen when calling on Miss Mordaunt.

"That man my father?" she ejaculated.

"Yes, your own father. He has grown older, and his hair has turned from dark to gray, but he has not otherwise changed. It don't seem possible, but your father has actually turned up at last, Mrs. Holm. That is he—that is Mr. Roberts, I'll swear to it!"

She continued to gaze after the receding carriage as if in a trance, and only when it vanished out of her sight did she bethink herself, of her prisoner.

Turning hastily to renew her grasp upon Winifred, she found that Winifred had taken advantage of her preoccupation and was gone.

It had happened that a carriage had drawn up to the curbstone a little distance off, where a lady had just dismissed it. Winifred seeing her opportunity, had instantly entered it, and was some distance away before Mrs. James had discovered that she was gone.

She returned to her boarding-house without further adventure but had scarcely removed her outer garments and seated herself by the fire to think over the fateful discovery of her father, when Mrs. Hunter knocked on the door and entered the room.

"Excuse my intrusion, Miss Leigh," she said; "I came up to bring a note which a gentleman left during your absence. He called to see you and seemed concerned that you were not in, so he wrote a note, sealed it, and left it."

Winifred tore open the envelope. It contained but a few words written on the reverse side of one of Lansdowne's visiting cards.

Winifred, I must see you on important business. I will call to-morrow evening at nine. H. L."

"Of course, Miss Leigh, your business is your

business and not mine," Mrs. Hunter said rather distantly. "I am not wanting to pry into your affairs at all, but I must speak my mind. Then there was something about that gentleman's face that I did not like, handsome though it was, and I wish to ask you—is he really your cousin?"

Winifred hesitated, she would not lie, and she could hardly confess part of the truth without confessing the whole. In that moment of hesitation, she resolved upon taking Mrs. Hunter fully into her confidence.

"Are you really my friend, Mrs. Hunter?" she asked.

"Indeed and indeed I am, and if you will say to me now that he is your cousin, I'll believe it, and gladly," she returned, eagerly. "I confess I came here to tell you that I wanted you to give up your room, but when I look into your face I cannot make myself believe ill of you."

"I am worthy of your esteem, Mrs. Hunter," Winifred said, gravely. "I should like to confide in you, for I need a friend and I do not believe you would betray my confidence."

"Never, if I find—but of course you are worthy of any recommendation, Miss Leigh, and perhaps I can get some sort of situation for you," she said, brightening. "I was thinking of you to-day when I was up at Judge Mordaunt's, in Lexington avenue—"

"Judge Mordaunt's—Lexington avenue!"

"Yes, it's a perfect palace of a place, and that grand the people must be happy there as they are in heaven. My cousin, Mrs. Hall, is managing house-keeper there, and she is quite a grand lady, I can tell you, with her black silk dresses so stiff that they'll stand alone, and her gold watch and chain that cost more than all the furniture in my house put together. She was telling me to-day that they were in need of a parlor-maid, and I wondered then and I wonder now, if it wouldn't be a good place for you? To be sure it seems hardly the thing for a lady like you, but you might get a recommendation which might lead to a better situation somewhere else."

"Oh, Mrs. Hunter," Winifred answered, excitedly, "it's the very place for me! I must go there, I must!"

"But—" Mrs. Hunter resumed, not a little surprised at Winifred's eagerness.

Winifred interrupted her.

"Mrs. Hunter, listen. Listen to what I tell you. It seems that all the secrets of my life are centering about that house. Just listen while I tell you."

In a quick, impassioned voice, every word ringing with truth and honesty, Winifred poured forth her own and her mother's story. She felt convinced she could trust Mrs. Hunter, and she held nothing back, even including her discovery of her father that day. Mrs. Hunter interrupted her now and then with a question or two, but believed the story implicitly from beginning to end.

"I have only one object in life now," Winifred said in concluding—"and that is, to clear my mother's name in the eyes of the world. I should like to know my father, myself unknown to him. Help me, Mrs. Hunter! I know I have the courage to meet Hubert Lansdowne when he is there, and never proclaim my relationship to him. Help me to some disguise—help me to procure the situation, and I will bless you all my life."

"I will get it for you," returned Mrs. Hunter, warmly, "trust me for it. If my cousin refuses to grant me this favor, I will never speak to her again. My dear, you'll go to Judge Mordaunt's house this very day. You shall have the situation, and your wit must do the rest, and may God help you to clear your dead mother's name, and to obtain for yourself a friend to protect you."

## CHAPTER XV.

AT EVENING TIME.

HAVING approved Winifred's bold project of seeking a situation in the very stronghold that contained



the secrets of her life, Mrs. Hunter proceeded at once to assist in its accomplishment, and upon the following morning with her assistance Winifred made her toilet. A wash in use among actors and actresses transformed her from the fairest blonde into a warm brunette. Her eye brows were skillfully darkened, and over her golden hair that was braided closely as possible around her shapely little head she wore a natural-looking wig of dark-brown hair. A pair of eye-glasses, a little judicious padding about the figure completely transformed the fair, slim girl into an apparently much older lady.

The two were just about to start for Lexington avenue, and were waiting in the little parlor previous to departing, when there came a loud and peremptory ring at the door-bell.

"I fear you are going to have a call, Mrs. Hunter. I see a gentleman and lady outside—I hope they will not detain us long."

"Probably some one on business, and I'll see that they don't detain us long, but did you ever—if that stupid girl isn't showing them right in here."

Winifred, looking out of the window as the servant hurried to the door, suddenly drew back in the shade of the curtains with a countenance full of dismay, for, standing on the door step she had recognized Walter Holm and Miss Evelyn Leigh.

Pale with anxiety, she flew toward the inner room, dragging Mrs. Hunter after her, and in a breathless whisper explained who the callers were.

"How lever in the world did they find out you lived here? What ever in the world can they want of you? The girl has confessed that you live here, and that you are at home, and as sure as you live they're coming into this very room. Just step into the back parlor, Miss Leigh, and shut the door. I will attend to them."

Winifred passed into the dining-room, and not a minute too soon, for at that very moment the servant ushered Mr. Holm and Miss Leigh into the parlor, announcing that she would go up-stairs and bring Miss Leigh down.

Mrs. Hunter stepped from the inner room and greeted the callers with smiling courtesy. Mr. Holm stepped forward as she entered.

"We have come to call upon one of your boarders. We are friends of hers, Mrs. Hunter, although it may be that she will not come down to us. In that case, we would request to be permitted to go to her room."

"The young lady is my niece," Miss Evelyn Leigh said stiffly and somewhat reluctantly. "Whatever her objections, my relationship gives me the right to intrude upon her."

At this instant, the servant reappeared with a blank face.

"Miss Leigh is not in her room," she announced; "I cannot find her hat and sacque, so she must have gone out—she must have gone out to try and sell some of them 'ere embroideries, poor soul."

"Are you sure she is not in her room?" Holm asked, his countenance suddenly falling; "probably she is in another—"

"And do y' mean she'd be a-hidin'? No, sir; she's gone out," affirmed the girl.

It was plain that the maid believed Miss Leigh to have gone out, and the callers were forced to accept the situation.

Mrs. Hunter's face was quietly impassive—no one would have dreamed that she was cognizant of Winifred's whereabouts.

"Have you any idea when Miss Leigh will be in, madam?" Mr. Holm asked, addressing her.

"How should I know?" she replied. "I did not even know she was out. If you are her friends, you might call again."

"We will come again this evening," Holm said, gravely. "Be sure and tell her, madam, that we are her friends, and that it is of the utmost importance that we should see her. Wait—I will leave a note for her."

He drew out his note-book and pencil and wrote a few words:

"WINIFRED, MY DARLING:—

"A detective, also a friend of mine, has discovered your place of refuge. Your aunt is with me as I write this hasty note. She repents her cruelty to you, and wishes to see you. My little darling, I want you to give me an opportunity to reason away this delusion of yours that your first husband lives. Only give me a moment's speech with you."

"WALTER."

He tore the leaf from the book, folded and inclosed it in an unused envelope which was also in his note-book. He hesitated a moment upon the address, and then wrote "Miss Leigh," and gave it into Mrs. Hunter's hands. And then, with evident reluctance departed.

When they were fairly in the street, Miss Leigh turned toward Holm with a face expressive of keenest unbelief and dissatisfaction.

"That servant thought Winifred was out, but she was not. Take my word for it, Mr. Holm, that woman is hiding her."

"The same idea occurred to me," Holm said. "But Mrs. Hunter will give Mrs. Holm my note, and when we go back this evening she surely will receive us."

In the mean time Mrs. Hunter had carried Holm's note to the inner room where Winifred waited. She found the girl with her face buried in the cushions of the lounge and trembling as if the voice of Walter Holm had stirred her being to its very center.

"Mr. Holm left a note for you, Miss Leigh," she said gently. "Did you hear all that was said? He is a very handsome gentleman but he looks as if he had suffered terribly. It is a hard fate that has parted you two, but you have done right, my dear."

She withdrew, leaving Winifred alone. When she returned a few minutes later, she found her quite calm and self-possessed, for Winifred had learned self-control in a stern school, and was one to hide her sorrows.

"The carriage is at the door, my dear," said Mrs. Hunter. "And Bridget says the lady and gentleman who called to see you are standing at the corner below as though they were watching. They do not believe you are gone out, and I don't doubt will be back presently. We must hasten or they will intercept us."

They hurried out, and Winifred entered the carriage first, Mrs. Hunter following, and were driven away just as Mr. Holm and Miss Leigh hastily returned. They had seen the lady in black as she passed to the carriage, and were positive in their belief that it was Winifred, but as the carriage had rolled rapidly away, they had no opportunity to even address her.

"Oh, how hard it is!" Winifred said in a broken voice, as she looked back from the carriage-window, and then turning her face resolutely away, she did not see, nor did Mrs. Hunter, that Holm had signaled a passing carriage and was following them a little distance off.

On arriving at the mansion in Lexington avenue, Mrs. Hunter and Winifred were shown into the housekeeper's parlor, where they found Mrs. Hall, an elderly lady of refinement, education and energy, who greeted her cousin with friendly warmth, and to whom Winifred was introduced as her special friend Miss Dale.

Winifred threw back her veil, and her face, small and dark was most sweet and grave to look upon. Mrs. Hall received her with politeness and showed her special attention, and as the acquaintance progressed Mrs. Hunter adroitly said:

"You were telling me yesterday, Cousin Miranda, that you were in need of a parlor-maid—some decent, respectable body that would be sort of company for yourself when working-hours were over; and so I have made bold to bring my friend here to



speaking for the situation. I will answer for her, and you know that my word is good as gold."

Mrs. Hunter's recommendation, no less than Winifred's personal appearance and manner, had its impression upon "Cousin Miranda," and on the spot she engaged Winifred to fulfill the duties of the position of parlor-maid in Judge Mordaunt's mansion and installed her at once.

It was the morning succeeding Winifred's admission to the household in Lexington avenue. She was busy with her duties in the parlor and library, going noiselessly about—so noiselessly that her presence was almost unknown to Judge Mordaunt, who, in the inner sanctum of the library, was busy with his morning papers.

She had almost completed her duties in that portion of the house, when the noise of feet sounded in the hall, the door of the library opened, and the servant entered, followed closely by, and announcing to Judge Mordaunt, Mr. Holm and Miss Leigh.

As they came in, Winifred almost gasped for breath, but vanished to a far corner of the room and busied herself, herself unseen, but where she could hear every word of the conversation. She was very silent, but her heart fluttered wildly. After greeting the two guests both of whom were strangers to him, Judge Mordaunt resumed his seat and Mr. Holm after a rapid observant glance about the apartment, proceeded at once to the business which had brought him there.

"You will pardon us, I am sure when you hear the business which brings us here. We venture to ask you to accord us an interview with a lady who at present is one of your staff of servants, a Miss Dale."

"Who is Miss Dale?" asked Judge Mordaunt pleasantly. "Any information I can give you I shall be most pleased to accord you. If I can be of any service to you in any way command me. You say you wish to speak to a Miss Dale in my employ?"

"Yes," Holm said decidedly. "She came yesterday. Perhaps, sir, your housekeeper—if you would kindly summon her—could give me the desired information. Will you call her, Judge Mordaunt?" Holm asked, his face flushed and eager.

"Certainly, sir," and as he spoke he turned toward Winifred, calling her toward him.

She trembled and looked about for some avenue of flight. There was none. A wild idea came to her to brave out the ordeal that had come upon her. She hesitated a moment. Judge Mordaunt called her again.

"Will you be kind enough to summon the housekeeper, or perhaps you do not know where to find the call-tube. You are a new-comer, I think."

As he spoke, Winifred rose and came forward, the very picture of a frightened little lady, with her false hair banded smoothly over her face, and her sweet, terrified eyes hidden behind her spectacles.

As she stepped forward Walter Holm also stepped forward radiant and joyful.

"Winifred!" he said softly. "oh, Winifred, I have found you at last! Judge Mordaunt, you need not send for your housekeeper—this is the lady whom we seek."

To Judge Mordaunt's profound astonishment, the parlor-maid gave a little cry of anguish and retreated from Mr. Holm's outstretched arms.

"Did you think you could disguise yourself beyond my recognition, Winifred?" Holm asked tenderly. "No, you shall not escape from me again; I have got you safe at last."

He caught her in his arms. She struggled to free herself, and succeeded.

"You have found me, Walter," she said in a tone full of keen pain. "It would have been better to have left me alone; but as my disguise is useless now, I will not retain it."

She stepped into the embrasure of one of the deep windows of the library, removed her spectacles and wig, and dipping her handkerchief into the silver pitcher of water that stood upon a small table near

by, washed the brunette stain off her face and then appeared before them again, revealed as Winifred Leigh in all her youth and innocence and glorious beauty.

Judge Mordaunt stared at her in utter speechlessness.

"Winifred," said Miss Leigh, "I ask you to forgive me for all my cruelty to you. When I heard from Mr. Holm that you were missing, I feared I had been the cause of your death, and the fear that I was an indirect murderer has at last brought me to my senses. I offer you a home at Leighlands, Winifred, and if you will come to me, I will make you my heiress."

"Winifred," added Holm eagerly, "I want you to come to me! Forget the illusion regarding the existence of your first husband, and be my own dear wife. Winifred, my darling—"

"Wait a moment, Walter!" she answered with a sorrowful smile. "Let me answer Miss Leigh first. I thank you, madam, for your kindness, but I will never go to Leighlands as one on sufferance."

"But, Winifred, you are not to blame," remonstrated Miss Leigh. "I have usurped the privileges of the Almighty, and visited the sins of the parents on the head of their innocent offspring. I wish to make amends for my wickedness. I will give you my name; I will adopt you legally, and I—"

"Wait!" interrupted Judge Mordaunt. "Is this girl Winifred Leigh?"

"She is," answered Miss Leigh, and Holm in a breath.

"Is she the daughter of—of—Eleanor Leigh?"

Miss Leigh uttered a hesitating, reluctant affirmative, at which Judge Mordaunt stepped forward to the center of the room, with the impressive dignity of a king.

"Then she has no need of being *adopted* by any one. She is *my* daughter, and as such I acknowledge her."

There was a general exclamation of amazed incredulity.

Judge Mordaunt held out his arms to Winifred, but she shook her head solemnly, and would not approach him. Yet she felt the subtle magnetism of his presence, and would have wished no higher happiness than to have flown to his arms, and to have called him "father"—but for the memory of her mother's fate.

"You have the Mordaunt pride, I see, Winifred," he said with a grave smile. "I know what you have been taught concerning your origin, and I declare to you here and now, that Eleanor Leigh was my lawful wife, and that you are legally and truly my daughter and only child—Winifred Leigh Mordaunt."

His words carried conviction with them, and they stood about him speechless.

At that moment the door opened, and Cornelia Mordaunt, accompanied by Hubert Lansdowne, entered the room.

An exclamation of the most intense excitement burst simultaneously from their lips at the tableau before them, and a smothered oath came from Lansdowne as he looked at Winifred standing there in all the glory of her lovely beauty.

For a moment a silence like that of death reigned; then, with a comprehensive glance around the little group that still stood in speechless amazement, Judge Mordaunt spoke again.

"An explanation is due you all," he said proudly.

"Nineteen years ago I became acquainted with a young girl named Eleanor Leigh, while she was in this city fitting herself for an artist. From our very first meeting I loved Eleanor Leigh with all the ardor of my nature. She loved me. I asked her to marry me and she consented. My father was living then and was building great hopes upon a marriage he was planning for me. Eleanor was not versed in society ways, and after marrying her secretly and establishing a home for her I formed the idea of molding her to my wishes. We lived to—



gether a year in perfect happiness. Then Eleanor began to importune me to acknowledge our marriage, and between her and my father I grew impatient and ill-tempered. I began to stay away from our villa for days together—not that I loved Eleanor less; but because I did not like to be so constantly importuned. We had a terrible quarrel one day—Eleanor and I—and I left her in the heat of my passion, declaring that I would never acknowledge her. They were cruel words, and God knows I did not mean them. My poor Eleanor, my poor lost wife! Have I not been terribly punished for those wild angry words many a time since?"

He passed his handkerchief over his face which was pale with agitation, and upon which a cold sweat of emotion stood in great drops and still that deathless silence reigned over the rest of the little group.

"I had scarcely left her when my father, who had somehow discovered my home with Eleanor, arrived at our villa, and had an interview with her.

"He assured Eleanor that I had repented of my folly in taking her to myself and that I loved a rich and beautiful woman and desired to marry her.

"I did not know this then, but on my father's death-bed a few months later, he confessed this to me. That same night I went back remorseful, resolved to acknowledge her as my wife immediately. I went, I say, but I found her gone! Gone and leaving no trace! How madly I searched for her, only to learn, weeks and weeks afterward, that she was dead and buried! I never knew until recently that she, my loving, loyal little wife, had borne a daughter, this girl standing before you. I do not deserve your love, Winifred, I dare not ask it, yet I see your mother's eyes in yours, and if you were only to forgive me the cruel wrong I did her, I think that from heaven she would smile upon us and indorse that forgiveness."

He turned a pleading gaze upon her, and with a choking sob, Winifred flew to his arms.

Holm covered his face with his hands. Down Miss Evelyn Leigh's face the tears were dropping big and slow. With wild eyes, a little apart from them, Lansdowne stood muttering curses upon himself, while Cornelia Mordaunt with a strange scornful smile on her face, watched the scene silently.

A moment later Judge Mordaunt broke the solemn silence.

"So, Winifred, you are Mr. Holm's wife? Although I have never before had the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance, he is not unknown to me from hearsay. I know him to be a noble fellow, I believe him to be worthy of my daughter. Put your hand in his, like a loving wife, Winifred. Mr. Holm, step this way."

But Winifred drew back, and all the brightness on her face became instantly overshadowed.

"It was no illusion about my first husband," she said. "Walter, have you not guessed the truth? There stands the man I married, the man who has so nearly wrecked my life, and God help me, he is as much my husband as he was then."

As she spoke she pointed to Lansdowne.

He smiled in a horribly ghastly fashion.

"Yes," he answered, "I am her husband."

"No!" cried Judge Mordaunt. "Lansdowne your husband! Lansdowne your husband! What am I to understand, then, by his coming here to pay his addresses to my niece?"

With a little laugh Cornelia turned to Judge Mordaunt:

"A fortunate escape, is it not, uncle Robert? It is no news to me."

"It is all up," said Lansdowne with a mirthless laugh. "A divorce will be easy enough to procure, Judge Mordaunt, but I will save you the trouble. For a life that has gone as far as mine has, it is a bad ending, but there is not much worth living for, after all."

As he spoke, he stepped to the table on which stood the pitcher of ice-water, and pouring out a quantity, his back turned toward them, no one saw him deftly drop a small portion of colorless liquid from a tiny vial he took from his vest pocket.

The glass in hand he turned toward them.

"I drink to your healths, all of you," he exclaimed. "Winifred, permit me to wish you happiness in your second marriage, and remember I was not all bad, for I have loved you from first to last, I love you still."

And with a look such as a fallen angel might have worn, Lansdowne lifted the poisoned glass to his lips and drained it to the dregs!

Then dropping the glass he fell to the floor, the fragrance of bitter almonds on his lips telling the agent he had used to dissolve the tie which united soul and body.

When they picked him up and carried him away he was dead.

And so passed Hubert Lansdowne out of Winifred's life.

Judge Mordaunt publicly acknowledged his marriage with Eleanor Leigh, and as publicly acknowledged Winifred as his daughter and heiress—Cornelia taking her place in social importance, as well as second in his heart and home.

The remains of Eleanor Mordaunt were taken up from their unhonored resting-place and put to their last long rest in the Mordaunt vault at Greenwood.

No one was happier in the acknowledgment of Winifred as Judge Mordaunt's daughter than Miss Evelyn Leigh. Her sister's name was cleared, and with the clearing all her grimness disappeared, and the geniality that had once characterized her in her girlish days bloomed forth anew. Her house was opened to her friends, and a year later the acquaintance she had formed with the grave, kindly, skilled detective, who had been the means of uniting Walter Holm and his bride, ripened into an intimacy that very shortly after resulted in a most desirable marriage.

For many years she had never spoken her sister's name, but now, many times every day she finds occasion to mention "my sister, the late Mrs. Judge Mordaunt," or "my niece, Mrs. Walter Holm."

Judge Mordaunt bids fair to live for years to come. He is honored, loved and cherished by Winifred and Walter, and he is happy.

Cornelia Mordaunt is not unhappy in the position into which she has subsided, and Stuart Lansdowne's place is far more worthily filled by a friend of Mr. Holm's, who, one day, expects to marry her.

While the mistress of the beautiful home on Lexington avenue, the heiress of the Mordaunt wealth, the sunshine of her husband's and her father's life, is the brilliant belle and beauty, the lovely and winsome Winifred, who through so much darkness has at last emerged into the full glow of sunshine and joy.

THE END.

L H AND A G GIDEON